

EXCLUSIVE: Out with the Old, In with the New (p. 92)

SPECIAL EVENTS

SPRING 2024

Trending *Upward*

ALL ABOUT
THE POWER OF
THEME
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INSIDE A GALA-
RECEIVING
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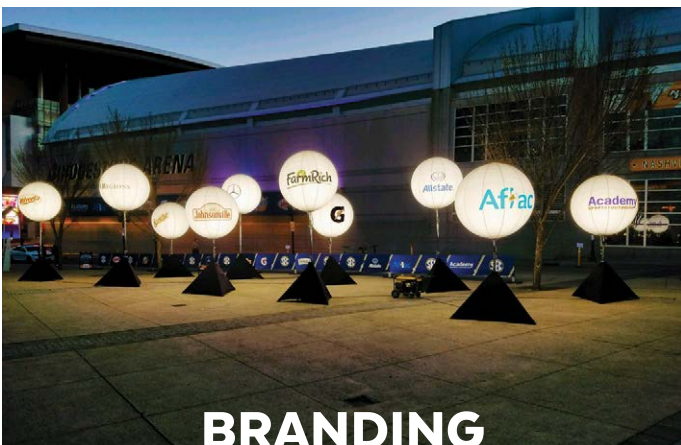
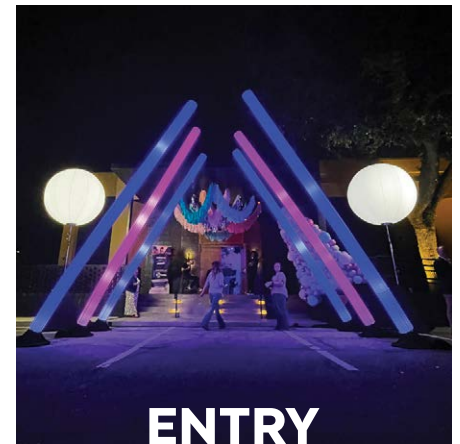
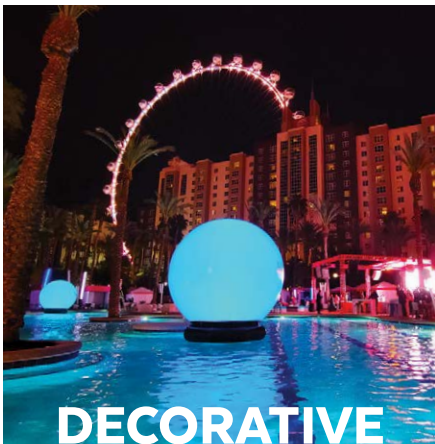
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Food Network star Ron Ben-Israel crafts bespoke sugar flowers as part of his signature wedding cake style. His process for creating customized edible florals is utterly fascinating. Shown is some of his finished work via the 2024 conference. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

True Confessions

I have a confession. I was so exhausted by the time I got to 8:30 p.m. on Thursday night of Catersource + The Special Event that I found the crew room at the Closing Night Celebration and sat for 20 minutes or so to decompress. I was on my eighth night of dawn-to-dusk work and if I remember correctly, I excused myself from whatever conversation I was in, began walking the venue and didn't stop until I found a quiet place to collect my thoughts.

As CEO Emily Malaya said in her *Hospitality and Health* session at The Special Event, "For an industry where customer experience is king, how are we ensuring our staff is best prepared to offer the best version of themselves, to offer the best service possible?"

I felt remorseful leaving my customers—my attendees—at the closing night event to take care of myself for a moment. We try to push through those feelings of high stress, thinking, "just a little while longer." And indeed, I've done that way more often than I'd like to admit. But that night I actually had the thought, "I don't know if I can do this job anymore."

That's my true confession.

When you get to that precipice, especially when you are in a job that you absolutely love—the only solution is tending to yourself. That's how you turn, "I don't know if I can do this job anymore" into "I don't know if I can do this job anymore—tonight."

As the conference organizer, I wrapped several mental well-being sessions into the mix. It's important stuff, and I certainly take the topic very seriously. Everyone should.

"When leaders value people for more than the job they do," said CEO Anthony Lambatos in his Catersource session, *Strategies for Improving Employee Well Being*, "they help them be their best both personally and professionally. [This leads to] increased productivity, greater fulfillment in life, and higher retention rates for the company."

Without the awareness of the part strong self-care plays in our careers, leaders are destined to burn out, and so are their employees.

As we move into the spring season, robust with social gatherings and corporate events of all kinds, I encourage you to listen to your inner voice and find your own iteration of a crew room should you find yourself at sea. If you are working for the right kind of company (as I am), it will support that decision.

Take some time for yourself and enjoy this issue of *Special Events* with your feet up, your favorite beverage nearby, and drink in the inspiration. Cheers!

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr
Director of Community & Content Strategy

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Spring 2024 THIS ISSUE

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Sales expert **Margaret Brower** discusses how to decode the language of sales success



Tech professional **Nora Sheils** talks auditing for future-proofing your business



PR expert **Meghan Ely** shares her top business takeaways from CS+TSE 2024



Wedding pro **Jaclyn Watson** reflects on innovation and inspiration at CS+TSE 2024

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Key Takeaways from Catersource + The Special Event 2024



The beauty of CS+TSE—and our industry as a whole—lies in the diverse perspectives of thought leaders with different backgrounds.

By Meghan Ely

With Catersource + The Special Event (CS+TSE) behind us and peak season around the corner, this time of year offers industry professionals a chance to reflect and prepare for the busy months ahead. If you attended this year's conference in Austin, TX, you likely returned home with pages of notes and pockets full of business cards.

This year's education covered everything from design trends and sales strategies to the most cutting-edge technology on the market. As wedding season approaches, don't miss the opportunity to take what you've learned and apply it to your business.

If you need a refresher, here are some of this year's top takeaways.

IT'S TIME TO EMBRACE AI

While artificial intelligence isn't a new concept, it's still widely overlooked in the catering and events industry. Fortunately, many speakers took the stage to drive home the importance of adopting AI in 2024—a message that was well-received by attendees.

"I am always looking for ways to streamline processes and level up technologies in our organization," [Magnolia Collective](#)'s Meagan Culkin says, adding that she was "impressed with the variety of sessions that focused on AI and automation technology."

Shannon Tarrant of [Wedding Venue Map](#) agrees, noting that most event pros aren't using AI. Thus, "by learning the basics of artificial intelligence in every aspect of your business, you're considered an early

adopter and can easily separate your company from the pack."

AI and automation tech are powerful tools for saving time and building consistent processes while serving to differentiate your business from competitors. Take advantage of it while it's still a new-to-the-industry concept!

SELF-CARE IS GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICE

Although we're several years removed from pandemic shutdowns, messages of rest and self-care persist as the industry continues to face evolving consumer demands, economic uncertainties, and an oversaturated market.

This year, a number of speakers stressed the importance of self-care for busy event pros. Sarah Chianese of [Mangia and Enjoy!](#) elaborates, recalling how the conference "opened up to a more humanistic side of the industry, going beyond sales, tech, and marketing strategies and diving into opportunities to explore, reveal, and dig deeper into what we need to take care of from the human side of events and catering."

[Oduberg Law, LLP](#)'s Leah Weinberg agrees that the self-care conversation is critical for the industry, especially now. "I had so many people come up to me after my talk on being an empath and a highly sensitive person in this industry, saying how much this talk was needed and how no one is talking about the emotional side of this industry right now," she says. "That's a clear sign that so many of us need to turn inward at the moment and prioritize our own needs before those of our clients."

The hospitality industry is built on serving others, but it shouldn't come at



Meghan Ely, Meagan Culkin, Katie Mast, Adrienna McDermott, and Kevin Dennis in their session *Rolling with the Punches: How to Stay Up-To-Date and On-Trend with AI, New Tech, and More in 2024*. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos



Jen Sulak in her Fast Chat session *Awkward Networking - Making Relationships Count!* Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos

the expense of wellbeing. Event pros must fill their cups first to thrive in this industry.

SUCCESS STARTS WITH BUILDING COMMUNITY

Hosting a national conference takes a village...but so does building a successful business. It should come as no surprise that industry thought leaders spoke often about the importance of networking and fostering meaningful relationships.

Keynote speaker Laura Schwartz addressed this point when opening the conference with her talk, *Common Ground*. Ian Ramirez of *Madera Estates* recalls a line that stuck with him: “Face-to-face interaction is the most powerful way to communicate.”

“I made a point to engage in more face-to-face interactions at the conference, in between sessions, in hallways, and at the Opening Night Party,” he shares. “Face-to-face interaction is the essence of our industry: bringing people together to communicate and enjoy shared experiences. Even better: making memories that will last a lifetime.”

Clint Elkins of *SB Value* shares Ramirez’s sentiment, adding that the tradeshow floor remains an excellent place to meet new people. “This is the perfect opportunity to make connections outside of the education sessions,” he promises. “You can learn

a lot from other businesses in terms of their offerings, as well as see first-hand what attracts other attendees to engage with them.”

For industry veterans, community involvement also provides a chance to pay it forward to the next generation of event professionals. “We all started somewhere,” reminds Jen Sulak of *Weirdo Weddings*. “I met so many still in school, and their joy was all over their faces. It reminded me of when I fell into my career!”

The power of relationships fuels the industry, so don’t take your network for granted. Nurture your connections well, and you’ll build a thriving community of supportive peers.

EXPLORE NEW IDEAS, BUT DON’T LET GO OF WHAT WORKS.

The beauty of CS+TSE—and our industry as a whole—lies in the diverse perspectives of thought leaders with different backgrounds. Caterers, photographers, florists, planners, DJs, and other pros converge to connect, learn, and educate.

Kevin Dennis of *Fantasy Sound Event Services* highlights the value of open-mindedness and approaching educational topics through a different lens. “I like to add variety to my conference agenda and attend sessions with speakers I’m not familiar with, as it’s helpful to hear someone else’s

perspective rather than exclusively attending sessions with speakers you’re familiar with,” he shares.

However, alternative perspectives are no reason to abandon what works in favor of the latest bright-and-shiny business trends.

For example, *Ava and the Bee’s* Adrienna McDermott cautions against eschewing traditional marketing channels like blogging. “Unlike social media platforms, which are subject to changes in algorithms and potential shutdowns, a blog provides a consistent online presence that you own,” she explains.

The lesson here: Welcome new perspectives and experiment with ideas, but keep investing in proven strategies like wedding submissions and educational blog content.

There was much to learn at this year’s conference, and it’s shaping up to be a productive year for all who attended. Details for next year have been announced, so be sure to save the date for *CS+ TSE 2025* in Fort Lauderdale, FL! ●

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

Trending

TOP EVENT SEEN AT CS

BY AMANDA

Attendees at Catersource + The Special Event had a great time at the Closing Night Celebration.

All photos courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos unless noted otherwise



Upward

IT TRENDS
S+TSE 2024

A NICKLAUS

CATERSOURCE + THE SPECIAL EVENT is always a premier place to spot the latest trends. Between the venue tour, tradeshow floor, education and keynote sessions, and evening events, it was easy to see what your clients might be looking for this year. Here are the top trends we spotted in February at the show.

Customization & personalization

Today's eventgoers want a hyper-personalized experience, something that makes their experience different from that of other attendees, even. During the show, attendees witnessed products and activities that provide opportunities to weave in unique touches.

Take, for example, customized sugar cubes by Sugar Lab Pro, which was featured at *Michael Cerbelli's: The Hot List™*, this year's Closing General Session keynote. This company uses 3D printers to create favors, desserts, and decor that match themes, color schemes, and feature logos in the form of candies, chocolates, and cocktail garnishes.

Attendees also witnessed hyper personalization in the form of logoed ice cubes by Abstract Ice, seen at the annual trend session *David Merrell & Susie Perelman Present: Current Trends in the Event Industry*. The ice was presented at the session and was etched with either an "M" or the logo "AOO" (representative of Perelman and Merrell's companies, respectively). Later, Abstract Ice could be spotted throughout the showcasing events stamped with Texas themes like cowboy hats.



Specialty ice cubes are a widely popular way to add details to food and beverage. Photo courtesy Stavros

Merrell and Perelman also touched on food and beverage stamping, which has gotten more efficient and affordable in recent years.

"This is a great conversation starter, something that you can create...what a great way to personalize your event," said Perelman.

Another form of personalization was seen in the form of activities at the evening events. Tarot card readings (Connect Social), caricature portrait drawings (Closing Night Celebration), and even caricature portraits of attendees' backsides (SEARCH Annual Signature Event) left attendees with a unique, individualized experience.



Caricature art like The Original Sketch, shown here at the SEARCH Foundation's Annual Signature Event, is a popular way to give attendees a personalized keepsake and party favor.



Logoed ice cubes made an appearance throughout the show.



Interactive readings, shown here at the Perfect Social, provide a unique individual experience to all attendees.



Justin Pasha (The Cup Bearer) and Michael Cerbelli (Cerbelli Creative) show *The Hot List* attendees customized sugar cubes to spice up beverages.



Spectacle

Events are experiences, and these days, those experiences need to be filled with dramatic flair. Every aspect of the event should be entertaining.

“We have this crazy, upside-down world, and it’s such a heavy world, and people really want to escape from that world and enter into a dream,” said Perelman. “More is more, big, big, bigger, and get away from the heaviness that we’re all experiencing.”

Attendees witnessed examples of this spectacle approach during *The Hot List™*, with a drone bartender that picked up a filled Boston shaker, flew it high above the bar, gave it a little shake, and then lowered itself back onto the bar top to deliver the finished beverage. The crowd also watched performances by flair bartenders and blowtorch-wielding caterers. The Closing Night Celebration also gave attendees a taste of the spectacular with servers parading through the venue with signs above their heads flanked with eye-catching flares, announcing each course of the night.

“You need massive LED screens and pyrotechnics and lasers and everything to really satisfy the audience,” noted Merrell. “It’s been something that we’ve seen building and building, and fortunately there’s a lot of tools in our industry to create spectacle.”

The Hot List™ also showcased striking production, making the Closing General Session a spectacle that had attendees grabbing their cameras to capture the extravagant performances of contortionists and roller-skating acrobats. The session pulled in the audience with music, accompanying LED light work, pyrotechnics, and messages from celebrities.

Top row: Famed contortionist Sofie Dossi wowed the crowd at Michael Cerbelli’s: *The Hot List™*.

Cerbelli showcased cutting-edge technology, including this robot dog.

Drone technology, like this bartending drone, is a popular choice for creating spectacle.





Above and left: Entertainment is a great (and expected) way to create spectacle. *The Hot List™* brought acrobatic roller skating dancers of *America's Got Talent* fame to the stage, amping up everyone in the crowd.



Fire & smoke

After *The Hot List*[™], the blowtorch-wielding geniuses from Gastro Garage made their way to the tradeshow floor, where they offered booth visitors a freshly torched donut.

This brings us to the next trend: in 2024, everything will be on fire. Or at least, smoked. Between sessions like *Where There Is Smoke, There Is Yumminess!* (at the Art of Catering Food conference before CS+TSE), *Fanning the Flames: A Culinary Journey into the Art of Fire Cooking*, and *Liquid Nitrogen: How to Wow the Crowd*, caterers took notes on ways to incorporate fire and smoke into flavors, cooking, and service.

“Smokin’ hot service, whether it is smoked charcuterie under glass, or the smoked bourbon stations, or the Flavour Blaster [an appliance that lays a smoke bubble onto the rim of a coupe glass] which you’ve been seeing for years, these are things that are becoming more and more readily available,” said Merrell. “This is something that just kind of creates an experience.”

Plus, between the sotol (a distillate with similarities to tequila and mezcal) attendees sipped on the venue tour and the mezcal trend Kristin Banta predicted isn’t going away anytime soon, we think smoke and fire are elemental to events in 2024.

Above: Pyrotechnics and smoke machines added flair to Michael Cerbelli’s: *The Hot List*[™].

Right: Gastro Garage could be seen with their torches at the Closing General Session and on the tradeshow floor.





Top and bottom: Smokey flavors are in, be it from smokey ingredients like mezcal and sotol or from smoke itself, demonstrated here by cookbook author and chef Keith Sarasin.

Inclusivity

While we've seen diversity and inclusion efforts ebb and flow in the past few years, Merrell and Perelman noted that neuroinclusivity is gaining traction. "Basically it's the idea that everybody interacts and experiences the world around them in a different way, and there's really no one right way or wrong way, so a neurodivergent person would be someone who has, like, ADHD, or OCD, or autism, or dyslexia—I would venture to say in this room, there are people that have certain variations or certain degrees of that," said Merrell, "and this is not to make fun of it, but it's actually to now start thinking about the fact that corporations are actually starting to pay attention to neurodiversity, and make sure that their content and what they do for everybody...is available for everyone to sensory process in their own way."

Several sessions focused on different forms of inclusivity and the various ways to incorporate good practices (*Elevate Your Catering Sales & Management Through Inclusive Practices; Diversifying Your Workforce: From Back of the House to the Boardroom; Embracing Diversity & Inclusion in Wedding Planning: Creating*



Cazoshay Marie (Divine Intervention Design) during her session *Beyond Barriers: Unleashing the Power of Inclusive Events*.

Unforgettable Moments That Honor Love in All Its Forms; and Ensuring Inclusive Events for All). These conversations have moved past their initial "inclusivity is important" forms and now break down practical ways event pros can—and have—successfully created inclusive events and businesses.



LED drummers perform alongside holograms at the Opening General Session. Note: holograms are very difficult to photograph—I'll bet you can guess which are live and which are holograms in this photo!

Holograms

If it feels like we're living in the future, it's probably because we're seeing so many holograms lighting up events. Attendees watched holograms of drummers perform alongside a live drumline at the Opening General Session keynote.

"You're seeing a lot more of the 3D hologram," said Deborah Elias (Elias Events) in her session *The Wow Factor: Technology and Trends for Your Events*.

Cerbelli featured a few types of holograms in *The Hot List™*, as well as Proto, a hologram communications platform that allows event attendees to interact with speakers from anywhere in the world. Elias also showcased several different types of hologram technology in her session, varying in quality and price.

"It's getting less expensive to do because... the more people that do it, the more products are available," said Elias.



An LED screen displays intricate, vivid imagery behind the live music at the Opening Night Party.

LED

LED lighting has gotten better in quality and cheaper in price, making this technology a staple at events. Between the Keynote Stage lighting and the Opening Night Party, LED walls and lights told the CS+TSE story with eloquence.

“When I first started, there were no LED screens,” said Elias. “I would say maybe 15, 17 years ago they started coming out and they were very expensive, and the pixelation was pretty wide.” But over the years, technology has improved.

“We’ve now kind of come down to this new era, where it’s not just LED display screens anymore, we’re doing the lucid ones now.” Elias noted that a lot of AV companies are investing in these screens. But there’s more than one type of LED light display; she also spotlighted LED sparkler lights, curtains, and display signs as trending event tech that really sets up a space.

“LED technology is getting more and more immersive,” said Merrell. “You can wrap entire rooms, you can create a transformative experience with your guests, whatever the messaging is.” He pointed to the Sphere in Las Vegas, a venue that’s wrapped entirely in LED tech to create incredibly vivid, immersive imagery.

Attendees got a taste of vibrant LED screens, which were seen lighting up the Keynote Stage and the Opening Night Party, providing intricate, eye-catching imagery to set the scene and stimulate their senses.



LED lighting can be incorporated in all kinds of ways, like this LED-lit furniture. Photo courtesy Kristin Banta

Apply Now to Speak at Catersource + The Special Event 2025!

We just wrapped a fantastic Catersource + The Special Event 2024! We are certainly feeling inspired and energized for the year ahead. In that spirit, we'd like to share our **2025 Call for Speakers**. Take a moment and submit your topic for this ultra-creative conference loaded with fresh and impactful content. We want to hear from you now so we can build our best program yet.

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YOUR DEADLINE: The deadline for speaker/session submissions is **June 10, 2024 at 11:59 pm CST**.

We can't hardly wait to see you next year in Fort Lauderdale!

To apply to speak at The Special Event: <https://tse2025.c4p.catersource.com/>

If you feel better suited to speak on all things catering, apply to speak at Catersource here: <https://cs2025.c4p.catersource.com/>

Monochromatics & color drenching

Color trends come and go, but at this year's show, we saw a lot of color unification.

Monochromatic color schemes are those that use multiple variations of the same color, and they are hot right now. In honor of Valentine's Day (and the SEARCH brand), varying shades of purple could be seen in furniture, decor, and atmosphere talent at the SEARCH Foundation's Annual Signature Event.

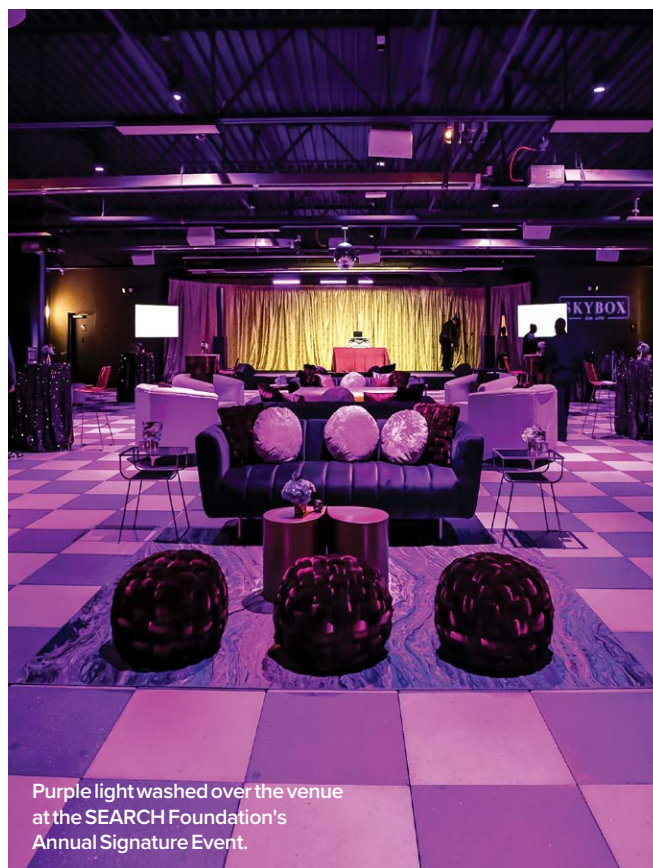
Brian Green (By BrianGreen) addressed monochromatic color schemes in his session *Applying the Principles of Color Theory to Elevate Your Events*, describing it as “when we're using one color effectively, using all the variations of lightness, saturation, dark, cool, warm, in one palette.”

He confessed a personal tendency toward this color scheme, and noted how “in events, monochromatic works really well in corporate. People tend to like ‘shades of,’ it makes it feel more powerful and strong—works really well in a floral palette as well.” Green emphasized the importance of understanding the technical side of a monochromatic color scheme; if someone says they like white, for instance, you'll need to walk them through all the shades and tones so an all-white scheme doesn't look flat on camera.

The other way this single-tone color work comes into play is in what Banta called “color drenching,” a technique that involves covering everything with one saturated color for dramatic effect. “Imagine one room entirely in Peach Fuzz,” she joked, referencing Pantone's Color of the Year.

“We're also seeing a lot of ‘let's just stick to the monochromatic, and let's incorporate all of the different monochromatic pieces that we can,’” said Liza Roeser (FiftyFlowers) in her *2024 Floral Tips, Tricks, & Trends in the Catering World*. She showed the audience a photo of a tablescape in which the candles matched the chargers and noted that even the food's colors were considered.

The best example we saw of color drenching at Catersource + The Special Event were neon cowboys at the Opening Night Party and the tradeshow floor, courtesy of Champagne Creative Group. These atmosphere talents were dressed head to toe in a single shade, from their cowboy hats and face masks down to their boots.



Purple light washed over the venue at the SEARCH Foundation's Annual Signature Event.



Every surface can be a varying shade and tone of the chosen color, like this curtain, wall, heart decor, and greeter dress encompassing versions of purple.



Shimmer & shine

We saw the disco ball trend take hold in 2023, and it's not going away anytime soon. Reflective surfaces could be spotted at every evening event this year, from table decor to ceiling treatments to costumed atmosphere talent.

At Connect Social, disco balls were paired with roses and feathers for an eclectic tabletop; at the Opening Night Party, plastic disco ball cups with pink cowboy hats doubled as beverage containers and take-home party favors. The SEARCH event drew eyes with a performer dressed head to toe in shiny, silver mosaic pieces—a living disco ball.

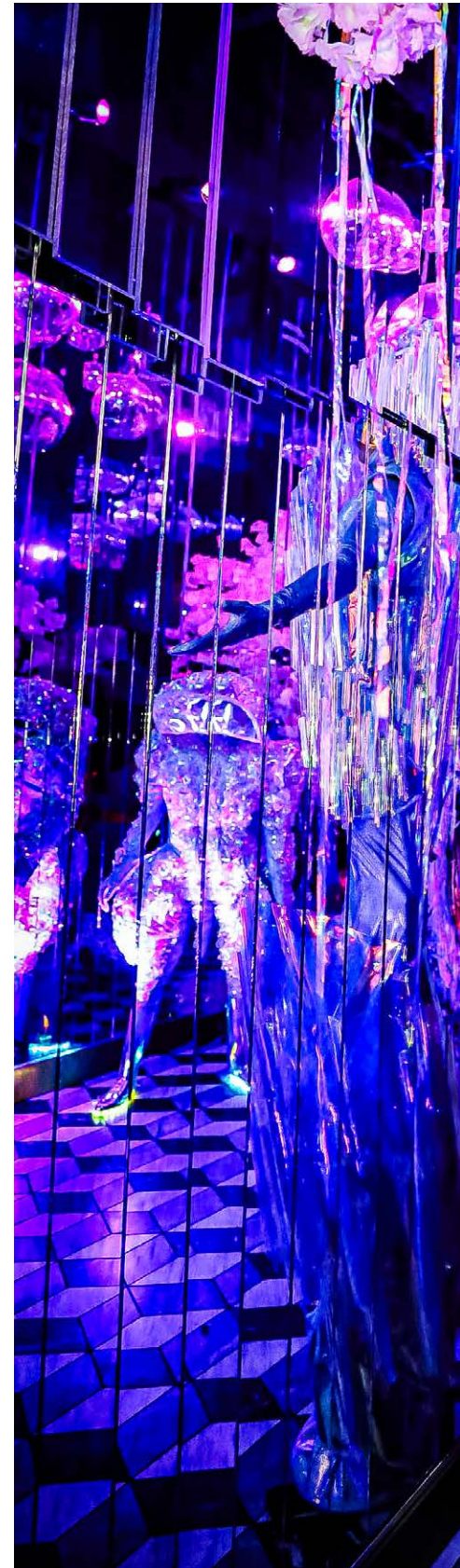
One thing to keep in mind: we'll be seeing the disco ball motif transform into all metallics in 2024, Banta pointed out in her session, predicting chrome will be trendy. Think all things shiny, sparkling, silvery, futuristic, eye-catching.

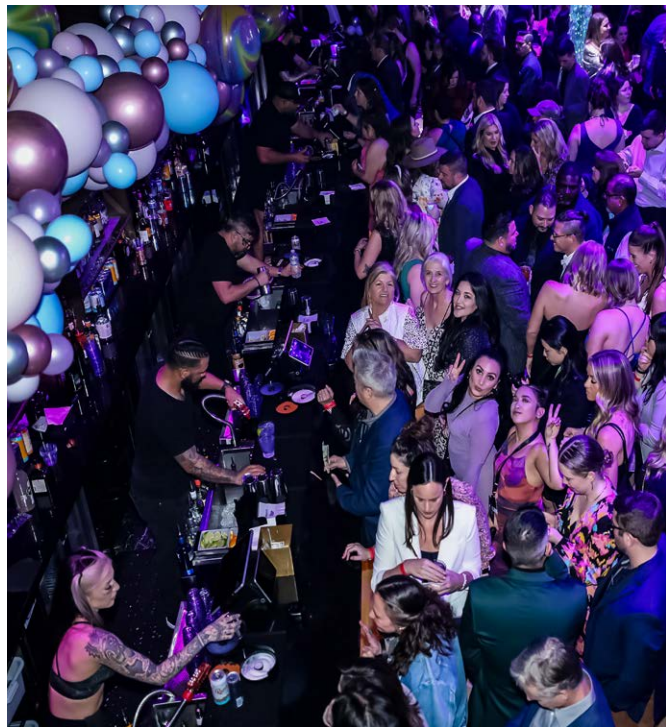
This was seen in the Closing Night Celebrations' "Prismatic Spectacle" theme, which draped the venue from top to bottom in metallics. Several variations of silvery, chrome costumes adorned greeters, dancers, and atmosphere talent; metallic balloons met attendees at the entrance and danced overhead, accompanied by silver tinsel streamers; and tinselly and glittery wall treatments sparkled behind attendees, who also wore their shiniest and glitziest attire. Everywhere you looked, your eye was met with a silvery, metallic dream.

These are just a few of the top trends we saw at Catersource + The Special Event, but as we make our way through 2024, we'll be keeping our eyes open for everything new and exciting making its way into the spotlight and into events! ●

Above: Shimmering tinsel and reflective tiles covered the walls at the Closing Night Celebration.

Right: Every surface at the Closing Night Celebration was reflective, from the mirror walls, chrome greeter costumes, and sparkling disco balls.





Top and bottom: Disco balls will stick around this year, but we'll see more chrome taking their place, like the chrome balloons at the Closing Night Celebration.



Decoding the Language of Success

How to Identify Your Ideal Sales Candidate



Choosing the right sales candidate extends beyond their resume; it's about finding someone whose natural language reflects the core values and goals of your event business.

By Margaret Brower

The language a sales candidate uses can reveal much about their potential fit and future success within your team. Interpreting a sales candidate's natural language during interviews offers insights into identifying those who will positively (or negatively) communicate with your clients.

The power of natural language in sales

When interviewing candidates for a sales position, it's crucial to go beyond surface-level listening, paying close attention to their choice of words, the connotations behind those words, and the positive implications their language may carry for your business. The natural language they use—those spontaneous sizzle words and phrases—can be incredibly telling.

Words like “absolutely,” “synergy,” “growth,” “potential,” “brainstorming,” and “listening” are not just buzzwords; they reflect a candidate's understanding of essential sales and relationship-building concepts. When I am interviewing candidates for my clients, I keep a running list of their language with positive and negative overtones, and the ease with which they use them.

Here's how you can read between the lines for positive sales hiring.

Step 1: Setting the stage

Create a comfortable environment conducive to open, genuine conversation. This setting encourages

candidates to drop their guard and speak freely, providing you with a clearer view of their authentic communication style.

Step 2: Listening for sizzle words & actions

During the interview, note the spontaneous use of key phrases that resonate with successful sales strategies. For example, a candidate who frequently uses “transparency” and “trust” likely values building strong client relationships. Similarly, mentions of “growth” and “potential” indicate a forward-thinking and ambitious mindset.

When evaluating candidates for a sales role, it's equally important to observe their body language, ensuring it aligns positively with their verbal communication. Positive physical cues, such as open posture, steady eye contact, and genuine smiles, can significantly reinforce the sincerity and confidence behind their words. Future clients will pick up on this before this future hire even speaks.

Step 3: Assessing growth & ambition

Pay close attention to expressions of personal and professional growth. Phrases like “I want to do more,” “I want to learn more,” and “I will...” signify a motivated individual driven by self-improvement and success.

Step 4: Understanding client-friendly communication

Reflect on whether the candidate's way of speaking is relatable and engaging from



a client's perspective. Can you envision them representing your brand and connecting effectively with your clientele?

Step 5: Role-playing for real-world application

Implement a scenario relevant to your sales process and observe how the candidate applies their natural language practically. This exercise can highlight their ability to navigate real-life sales situations while maintaining a client-focused approach.

Additionally, pay attention to the organization of their thoughts during this scenario. A well-structured response, clear articulation, and logical progression of ideas can indicate a candidate's ability to think critically and communicate effectively in high-pressure sales environments.

Step 6: Reviewing & reflecting

Post-interview, review the frequency and context of the sizzle words used. Did they contribute meaningfully to the conversation, or were they merely surface-level? This reflection helps determine if the candidate's communication style aligns with your company's values and client needs.

AI TIP: You can upload the transcript of your virtual interview screening into your favorite AI software and prompt, "I want you to analyze the language of this candidate for an HR and sales perspective. What type of communicator are they? Do you identify any potential challenges in their communication style with wedding or corporate clients of [name of your company]."

Step 7: Making the decision

As a sales coach, I know that adjusting a new hire's language post-recruitment can be a challenging endeavor; reteaching positive language and reshaping communication habits often represent a steep hill to climb. It is much easier to hire a candidate who speaks positively naturally and as an established habit.

Combine your linguistic observations with the candidate's overall qualifications and cultural fit. The right candidate should exhibit a communication style that complements your team's approach and enhances your brand's relationship with clients.

Choosing the right sales candidate extends beyond their resume; it's about finding someone whose natural

language reflects the core values and goals of your event business. By focusing on the nuanced ways candidates express themselves, you can uncover valuable insights into their potential to thrive within your team and contribute to your company's success.

Remember: Hire Hard; Manage Easy. ●

From over 15 years of loving and living the life of a results-driven Director of Sales, Margaret Brower developed a sales program with a two-fold leadership approach: skill development and human development. The outcome was a team that was fed emotionally, and experienced exponential growth in annual revenue with over 600 weddings per year. Now as CEO & Founder of [Rainmaker Sales & Marketing Group](#), her company is providing catering sales teams across America with the tools to attract ideal clients, teaching empathetic sales techniques designed to maximize revenue as well as highlight individual potential, and captivating their clients throughout the planning process using interactive marketing solutions.

ON THE OFFER

IMMERSE YOUR ATTENDEES IN YOUR EVENT STORY
USING THE POWER OF THEME

BY AMANDA NICKLAUS



...
ON TREND

It's hard to imagine a great event without also imagining a strong theme. Over the past few years, we've seen themes gain a foothold in the events industry, working their way from brand activations to catering to every element of an event. A solid, clever theme isn't a fun bonus anymore: in 2024, it's a necessity.

The themed event is fun and popular, so be prepared for your clients to want innovative, never-been-done-before ideas. With the right approach, you can avoid the stale or caricatured, and harness your creativity to create solid, unique motifs that your clients will be thrilled to show off.

Before you begin brainstorming and scrolling social media for inspiration, let's pull the curtain back on this rising event trend.

Contortionists set the scene for FREAK SHOW, a corporate reception by Cerbelli Creative that was themed with circus obscurities. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography



Atmosphere talent for FREAK SHOW were costumed in all things circus, like this stilt walker in big top attire. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography

Themes on the rise

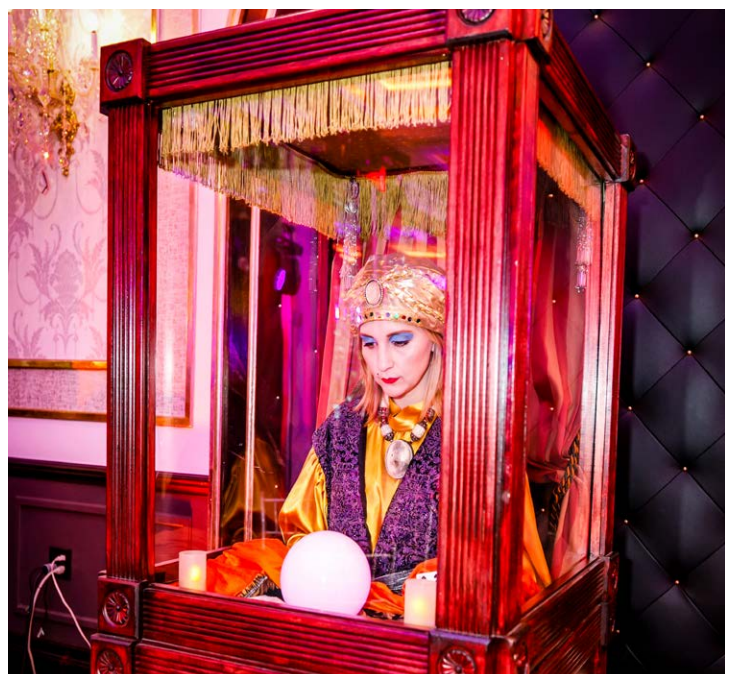
There's not much good we want to credit to the 2020 pandemic, especially in the event world. But vibrant theme events are flourishing thanks to that long year-plus of being locked inside.

Re-emerging into a post-pandemic world left people eager to participate in stimulating experiences. We saw an explosion of immersive events based on popular fiction worlds (*Stranger Things: The Experience*; *The Queen's Ball: A Bridgerton Experience*, to name a few)—after consuming copious amounts of TV at home, many people were ready to step back into not only the world at large but also their favorite fiction worlds.

Brand activations also presented immersive worlds, with themes inspired by clients that ranged from movies to books to clothing brands. These pop-up events have relied heavily on themes to engage consumers and create marketing content.

Add to the mix that while people were eager to share photos from new experiences, TikTok was taking off, with theme night friend hangs going viral. Then, in 2023, with the excellent marketing of cinema (*Barbie* and *Oppenheimer's* pink and black for the famed “Barbenheimer” look) and music events (Renaissance and Eras tour themes), the excitement of dressing up and participating in themes took off. And now, in a moment of time where people want to participate in personalized, unique experiences that haven't been done before, immersive theme events are in high demand. The more unique the better.

“One in three consumers prefer to have a theme for their events—even if it's incredibly niche,” states an article from research platform **GWI**. These days, “incredibly niche” is actually the desired aesthetic.



FREAK SHOW was the 2024 Gala recipient for Best Event Produced for a Corporation or Association: Overall Budget Over \$500,000. The event was filled with themed amusement. (Top) Greeters welcomed guests

into the freak show. (Bottom left) A sword swallower performed on the bartop. (Bottom right) Madam Zoltar told fortunes, giving guests a taste of the esoteric. Photos courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography



ON TREND

Telling a story

Themes are more than a fun decorating technique; they are the glue that can hold events together and offer several benefits.

“While not all events require a theme, having one can offer many benefits, such as easier planning, increased attendee engagement, and a more memorable experience,” says an article from experience agency [Wildfire](#). “Even a simple theme can provide a direction for your event and make it more cohesive and enjoyable.”

Themes provide a thread to tie every element of the event together, creating strong visuals and a unified experience for attendees—and for marketing content, which will help you as a business.

In her session *Unleash Your Creative Superpowers: The Art of Theme-ology!* at Catersource + The Special Event, event pro Teri Jakob (Associate Director, Special Events, UPMC Pinnacle Foundation) went as far as to say that all events do require a theme.

“Themes are not just decorative elements that you add in, they’re not catchy phrases, they’re not pieces of slogans,” she told attendees, “they are the backbone of any successful gathering. They give your event a unique identity, they give personality and soul to what you are doing and the story you are telling.”

Your event should always tell a story, and themes are the storyteller, she continued. “They set the stage, they guide the narrative, and they are what is going to leave the lasting impression on your guests and your attendees.”



For their gala “Alice, Curiouser & Curiouser,” the Peace Arch Hospital Foundation created their own Wonderland with a “Queen’s Court Silent Auction.” Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy Photography



Wonderland signs pointed attendees in the right direction at Alice, Curiouser & Curiouser. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy Photography

“Themes are not just decorative elements that you add in, they’re not catchy phrases, they’re not pieces of slogans; they are the backbone of any successful gathering. They give your event a unique identity, they give personality and soul to what you are doing and the story you are telling.” —Teri Jakob



Intricate co- party tables Photo cour



Every inter the ceiling



Color and texture play created a whimsical tea set centerpiece that took attendees to Wonderland. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy Photography



A Queen of Hearts Welcome Cocktail with a white cotton candy bunny tail garnish. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy Photography



Action is a chance to tell the story. Here, a butterfly costumed performer flutters down from the ceiling to pour attendees a glass of wine. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy Photography

Offering creative themes also sets you apart from your competitors, making your events stand out from those whose offerings are less cohesive and don't tell clear stories. They make you the planner who knows how to make events stand out—and in 2024, clients want their event to stand out.

"In a move close to influencing, this party trend reveals how hosts are looking to impress their guests and show off their creativity in one fell swoop," continues the GWI article. "It's all about converting ordinary events into extraordinary memories (and looking cool while you do it). The more original the theme, the better."

Getting started

The best place to start is with your story. Define your narrative, ensuring you know what story you are trying to tell and what emotions you want your attendees to experience, and that this narrative aligns with what the attendees will take away, suggests Jakob.

Next, she encourages developing a story arc. "Create an arc that brings your attendees from the beginning to the end, a clear journey that creates anticipation and engages participants, and provides them with a conclusion."

In their session *How to Design for the Senses*, Tiffany Rose Goodyear (Scentex) and Terrica (Cocktails & Details®/Terrica Inc.) echoed this story arc. "This is going to be so much more than logistics and menus that we're putting together," said Terrica. "We want to be able to bring our guests in from the very beginning, have some sort of experience—some communal experience—in the middle, and then, having our crescendo at the end."

The next step is to fill out the story with details—these should be found in every element of your event, from guest activities to food and beverage, to entertainment. "Create immersive experiences that bring the story to life," Jakob told her audience. Your attendees



ON TREND



At Catersource + The Special Event's Connect Social, bold patterned tapestries and neon lights set the tone for the "Electric Bohemian" theme. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos



Attendees were offered tarot readings, a fun and or activity. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos

Trending Themes

Between the forecasts in Kristin Banta's (Kristin Banta Events) *Kristin Banta's Design to Impact 2024* and David Merrell (AOO Events, Inc.) and Susie Perelman (Mosaic)'s session *David Merrell & Susie Perelman Present: Current Trends in the Event Industry*, here are the top trending event themes we think will make their mark in 2024:

- **Mixed themes**, often paradoxical (neon cowboy, Barbenheimer, hip-hop rogue)
- **Bohemianism**: more eclectic than Coachella-inspired now, 70s folklore, Laurel Canyon vibes
- **Preppy**: stripes, corduroys, popped collars (they're back!)
- **Dopamine decor**: bold, vibrant, whimsical colors and elements; joyful, playful, positive, pattern play
- **Mob wife**: inspired by the 25th anniversary of *The Sopranos*. Think: excess, baubles, cigarette candy, trashy, animal prints
- **Chrome**: replace disco balls for metallics
- **Western gothic**: a revised twist on the *Yellowstone* craze of last year; vintage Americana chic
- **Italian grandmother**: a departure from "Coastal Grandma" aesthetic while still celebrating "grandmacore": European sophistication, marble, wood, collected ceramics, upscale
- **Retro**: '70s, '90s, '00s
- **Wonky-weird**: whimsical, saturated colors, pattern mixing, escapist, light-hearted (inspired by the latest iteration of the *Willy Wonka* film)



n-theme
AGNYC

Whimsical and free-spirited, the venue was decorated in tapestries, stained glass light fixtures, and lots of vibrant colors
Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos.

should be completely immersed in the theme, and wherever they are should be an obvious tie into the story.

This means that the theme needs to be carried through consistently. “Make sure that everything matches all the way through your event,” said Jakob, “from the colors to the type styles, from the entrance, from the start, from the time you’ve sent your save the dates out so that there’s cohesion, so that people recognize that is tied to the same event.”

As you and your team brainstorm, keep open minds and room for all ideas, so that you don’t “squash the thought process,” as Jakob put it. Then, as you begin to sort through your ideas, she suggests keeping an audience-centric approach, making sure every idea you keep ties back to your original goals

of what you want the attendees to experience and take away.

Elemental opportunities

To create a truly immersive event theme, go through every aspect of your event and see how you can tie it back to the theme and use it to tell the story, from tangible to intangible elements. This includes pre-event, during, and post-event. It includes the physical and digital spaces. No matter what part of the event the guest is experiencing, it should be infused with the theme.

“You want to think about every portion of your event as being a chapter in a story,” said Terrica.

Spatial design

The event space is likely the easiest place to incorporate your theme, but consider using the venue’s features beyond the obvious ways. We’re seeing immersive entrances gaining popularity, announcing the theme and beginning the storytelling process right upon guests’ arrival, creating what Terrica calls “a portal into the story.”

Make sure to utilize as many surfaces as possible (without crowding) to display theme decor, including the ceiling and floor. You can use different rooms to create micro themes, telling different parts of the story as guests make their way through the space. (Don’t forget to continue the theme into the bathroom, too!)



ON TREND

Of course, the venue itself should also be on theme. If you're planning a 1920s party, for instance, host it in a speakeasy, or take inspiration from last year's Gala recipient for Best Event Produced for a Corporation or Association: Lenny Talarico Events and Cerbelli Creative who used a WW2 aircraft carrier museum/event venue [for an event](#) whose theme took attendees through the past 10 decades.

Sensory details

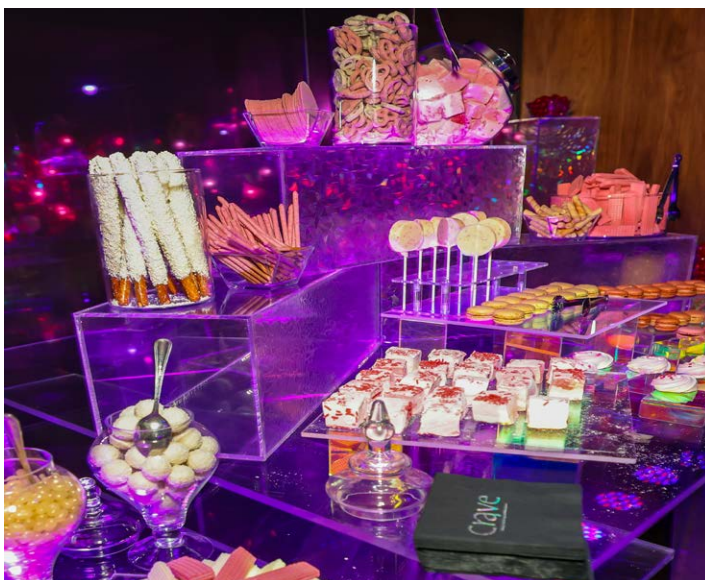
The best way to create an immersive experience is to engage all five senses of the attendees. This means that each sensory encounter is cultivated with the theme in mind. "An event is a room full of nervous systems," said Goodyear. "We experience the world through our five senses.... Us as experience creators—it's essential that we talk to every single sensory receptor in peoples' bodies."

Go through each of the five senses and figure out how you want each one to be a vehicle for the theme.

- **Sight:** Consider every color, texture, and image people will take in when they look around the event space. This also extends to marketing materials and stationery.
- **Hearing:** Create soundscapes with customized soundtracks and sound baths. Make sure to also consider



For the CS+TSE Closing Night Celebration, attendees put on their shiniest finery. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos



What's more prismatic than sugar? A candy table offered shimmering sweets. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos



The Closing Night Celebration's "Prismatic Spectacle" theme was all things chrome and shine. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos

natural noise and the acoustics of the venue. Consider tempo, volume, pitch, and even frequency and how those will affect your attendees' moods and emotions.

- **Touch:** You may not realize it, but events are rife with tactile experiences. People will experience a variety of temperatures, textures, and surfaces throughout the event (and even before, if you send out physical invitations—and after, in the case of party favors).

Goodyear encourages thinking about what people will feel beneath their feet and how they will experience it: whether carpet, hardwood, grass, or cobblestone, each surface will feel different beneath flat shoes, high heels, walkers, and wheelchairs. If you incorporate ribboned or LED streamer entrances, consider how attendees will associate the physical feeling in terms of the theme.

The dining experience is also more than just taste: the texture and

softness of linens, weight of silverware and glassware, even the feeling of etchings or stitching all play a part in telling the story.

- **Scent:** You'll want to consider the natural scent of your venue (is it an old, woody building? A newer industrial space? Are you outdoors?), but you can also manipulate the "scentscape" with food, candles, and fragrances. While sometimes forgotten, scent is an easy way to



Bright lights and metallic balloons made the entrance shine at this year's Closing Night Celebration. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos



ON TREND



For a theme looking back through history, Lenny Talarico Events and Cerbelli Creative used INTREPID, a WW2 aircraft carrier museum/event venue to set the scene. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography

Use a Timeline

When working on a theme event, sometimes, the more it comes together, the more the ideas flow. And while this can be helpful in the beginning stages, it's not ideal to have clients or team members making suggestions five days before the event.

"I like to implement a 'Great Idea Deadline,'" said Teri Jakob (Associate Director, Special Events, UPMC

Pinnacle Foundation) in her session *Unleash Your Creative Superpowers: The Art of Themeology!* at Catersource + The Special Event. "I work with a lot of committees who come up with lots of great ideas...I have some staff that like to come up with a lot of great ideas too, and you know, five days before the event is not the best time for this mind-blowing event idea, and I

just can't make it happen—and I can't make it happen in a way that represents us well."

Your Great Idea Deadline will vary depending on your capacity and your event but include it in the overall timeline so everyone knows when to leave the brainstorming behind.

"Sometimes we just have to save it for another day, or another event," says Jakob.

create emotional takeaways and create a memorable theme. “Food is an intimate sensory experience...whereas scent is a shared experience,” reminds Goodyear.

- **Taste:** Your food and beverage menu are perhaps the easiest place to incorporate a theme—think about how you can change the flavors and serving styles throughout the event to help tell that story.

It's important to note that all these sensory experiences dynamically play off one another, so make sure to keep the emotional component cohesive. If you have a pink theme, don't just make everything pink—think about how the different flavors, textures, and scents of pink things come together to tell your

story and solidify the theme.

Terrica suggests increasing the portions of each sensory experience throughout the event—introductory in the beginning, bigger in the middle, and grand finale-sized at the end.

Everybody involved

An important question to keep in mind, Terrica continues, is, “What are we doing, and who are we doing it for?”

These days, attendees want to be as much a part of the theme as possible.

In her session *Kristin Banta's Design to Impact 2024*, designer Kristin Banta (Kristin Banta Events) discussed the trend of thematic attire and dress codes for all. “Interactivity and connection...is greatly achieved

by giving people something to do and wear and be a part of it.”

You don't want anyone breaking the fourth wall, so involve everyone you can. “This is for event staff, performers, servers—there's a surge in more eclectic and fashion-forward, creative attire for attendees,” said Banta, with a nod to the Catersource + The Special Event Opening Night Party's “Neon Spur” theme (turn to page 104 for more on that). “We're seeing this everywhere.”

David Merrell (AOO Events) and Susie Perelman (Mosaic) echoed this trend in their session *David Merrell & Susie Perelman Present: Current Trends in the Event Industry*, noting that this can look like inviting attendees to come in their best costumes or even providing

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ON TREND



Bomber aviator costumed atmosphere talent reinforced the WW2 aircraft portion of the decades theme for The INTREPID Celebration. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography

on-site hair and makeup, which “creates a sense of community.”

Activities

The activities and entertainment that are sprinkled throughout the event are opportunities to continue the storytelling with vignette moments. “Go macro, then go micro,” encouraged Terrica.

Jakob pointed toward Catersource + The Special Event’s Connect Social event, which featured tarot card readings to emphasize the “Eclectic Bohemian” theme. Crafts, especially ones that attendees can leave their mark on, like the paint by number mural at Connect Social, can tell different chapters of the story.

She also suggested using interactive installations (or—as Banta emphasized in her trend forecast—interactive lighting) to engage attendees.

Entertainment can be on theme, the way a live band played country music at the “Neon Spur” Opening Night Party, but entertainment can be combined with activities for greater impact. Jakob gave an example of a *Bridgerton* theme event where attendees were offered ballroom dancing lessons and then used their new skills to enjoy the ballroom music provided, mimicking the characters in their favorite show.

Every touchpoint is an opportunity to emphasize the theme and tell a detail of the story.

“Everybody wants to have more impact on experiences post-COVID,” Jakob reminds us. “People are pickier about where they put their time, they want to know more about what’s going on and how to come away with something that impacts them.”

Even after the event ends, the photos that people share will continue to tell the story. You need that story to have been so clearly, cohesively executed that everyone who participated tells it accurately and excitedly, in person and on social media. Help them out by providing hashtags for them to use.

Remember: clients want to host hyper-personal, unique events that will impress their guests and friends, look exceptional on social media, and leave a lasting impression. Don’t rely on stereotypes; instead, get to know the story your client wants to tell, and use every detail and sensory experience to play out that narrative. Get everyone and everything involved. And don’t forget to have fun—this is your chance to let your creativity and expertise shine! ●

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1

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2

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assistance is available**

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3

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4

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6

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Post-Conference Buzz: Tech Tools for Smart Follow-Up



It's all about having the right tools and steps in place for an efficient follow-up that feels authentic and keeps the conversation flowing.

By Nora Sheils

I think we are all still feeling the incredible buzz from being at Catersource + The Special Event 2024 in Austin, TX this past February. Our crew at Rock Paper Coin sure is!

Coming back from any industry event is always such a good feeling; you are inspired and filled with drive, motivation, excitement—and let's not forget to mention a giant stack of business cards (hopefully mostly virtual!). But how do you turn that excitement into actual results? It's all about having the right tools and steps in place for an efficient follow-up that feels authentic and keeps the conversation flowing. Don't worry; we have your back with our favorite tips below. Let's dive in!

ACTIONABLE ITEMS YOU CAN DO TODAY

First step: digitize those business cards

Don't let potential collaborators get lost in a stack of paper. Use a business card scanning app (try Covve) to instantly create digital contact records. Then, the next time you head to a networking event or conference, make sure to use Popl, a digital business card service where you can quickly (and impressively) share your contact information with other attendees.

Keep that social media love growing

Follow new connections on their social media platforms (especially LinkedIn and Instagram) and watch the connections thrive. Send a quick, personalized DM reminding them of your conversation or meet-ups at

the conference. Be sure to also head to their profile and comment on their recent posts and reels. This will solidify your connection and ensure a future relationship.

Go ahead and send that "nice to meet you" email

Within 24-48 hours, send a friendly email to promising connections you hope to create stronger relationships with or to work with in the future. Thank them for their time, reference something specific from your conversation, and offer to schedule a follow-up call or coffee chat with them. You can even throw in that you can hardly wait to work with them in the future or to refer your clients to them starting this season. Now that's an email we all would be happy to get!

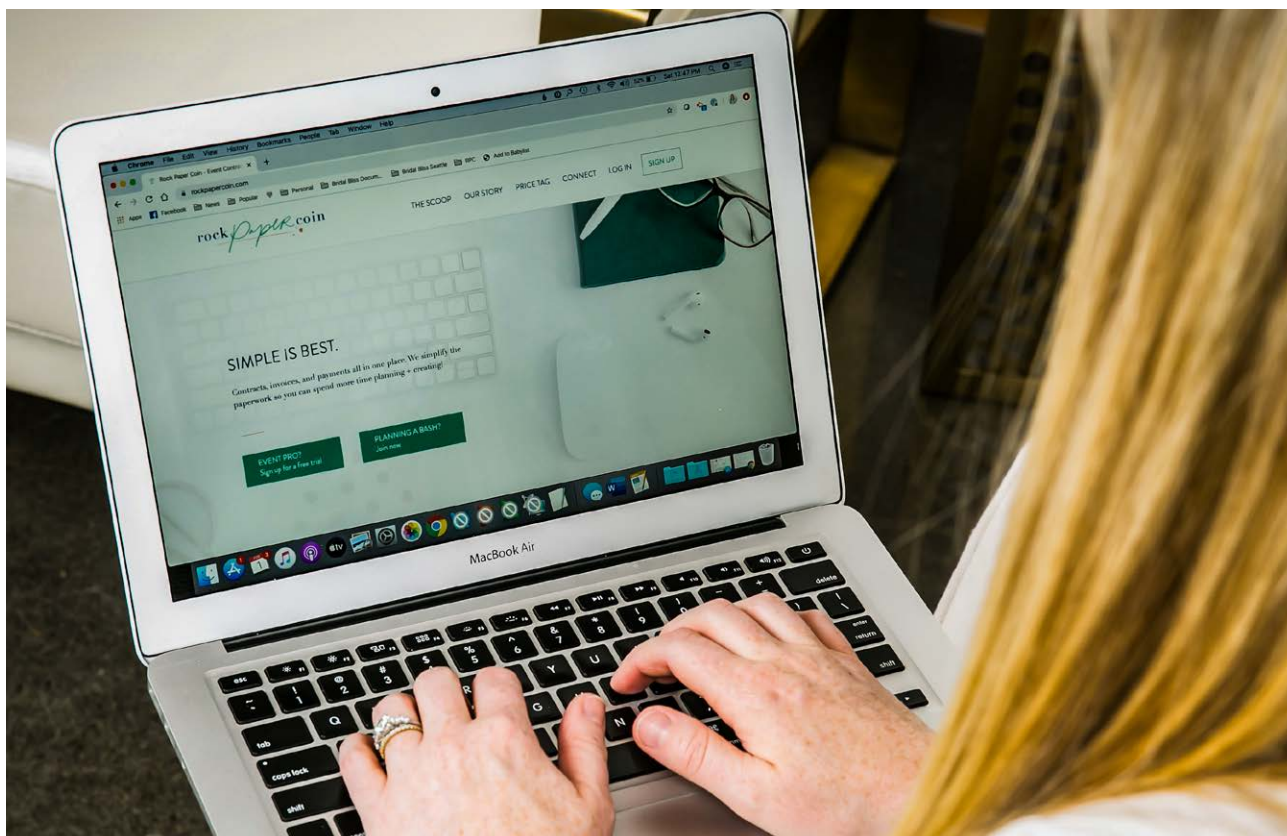
SET UP FOR SUCCESS: YOUR POST-CONFERENCE TECH STACK

Chances are some of your conference and networking experiences are going to lead to sales and potential future customers. Let's explore our favorite tools to streamline your process and nurture that future business.

CRM

This is the heart of your follow-up system. A CRM books future customers and stores client details, all while making you look professional and ready to handle their business. Be sure to use a system that is client and user-friendly to have the best results.

Email is a surefire way to lead with the first best impression of you and your brand for a new contact. Our favorite tool is Flodesk, which lets you create on-brand newsletters and messaging,



sending valuable content or special offers to your contact lists, all with gorgeous templates and an ease of use that anyone can handle.

Scheduling on your terms

No one wants to play tag with their calendar. Eliminate the back-and-forth of scheduling meetings by using our favorite tool, Calendly. Quickly and easily share your availability in an email or text and allow contacts to book directly on your calendar when you are available.

PUT THESE TIPS AND TOOLS TO USE

While tech tools are amazing, keeping the human touch in your process is incredibly important. Automation is about efficiency, not losing the personal connection with colleagues. Here's how to strike the perfect balance:

Email templates

Create basic follow-up email templates but always personalize them. Add specific references to your conversation at the conference to show your genuine interest. Everyone can always tell the

difference between a 100% canned email and one that has a human behind it.

Social media engagement

Actively engage with new connections' posts on social media. Share thoughtful comments and congratulations; it keeps you top-of-mind organically—and don't stop after only a week!

Value-add content

Don't forget to blog, share exciting news, or curate resources relevant to your niche. Share them in an email blast or on your social media feed and invite your new connections to add their thoughts and contributions. This not only establishes your expertise but invites others into your community and makes it stronger.

Virtual "coffee" meetups

Get on a Zoom or Google Meet and keep the connection going. You can invite a few pros to join and make it a happy hour. Virtual chats are a great way to maintain connection and rekindle conference energy.

At the end of the day, conferences are investments, and you can protect your time, energy, and money by making

the most of your current and future conference connections. Maximize your investment by streamlining follow-ups, keeping the conversations going, and most importantly, keep building those authentic relationships within your industry community. You might be surprised by the genuine friendships that will come in return. ●

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 is a well-known and sought-after speaker on national stages. Recognized as one of the Top 500 Event Professionals by BizBash, Nora has also been heralded as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the Event Industry by Eventex. More recently, Rock Paper Coin was celebrated by the Stewie Awards as the Best Startup in Technology Services.



FOOD FOR PÊTES

Springing Into a New Season



**Get inspired with DSquared
Hospitality Company's
Spring Menu Rollout**

By Amanda
Nicklaus

All photos courtesy
Mandee Rae





Center: Garlic & thyme
roasted rainbow carrots
& leeks; Right: Grilled
coulotte steak, black
garlic demi-glace



FOOD FOR FÊTES



French onion soup with gruyère tuile

SPRING IS A SEASON BEST CHARACTERIZED BY a sense of renewal, a time when the earth becomes green again and a variety of fresh produce returns to the scene.

It's also a time when caterers create new menus, leaning into the flavors and colors that haven't been available throughout the cold of winter.

Seattle-based DSquared Hospitality Company rolled out their new spring menu in March, leaning into the local produce of the Pacific Northwest.

Ashley Durant, the executive sous chef of Tuxedos and Tennis Shoes, a DSquared company, weighs in on being true to the local microclimate while embracing the change in season: "The interesting thing about developing a spring menu in our region is that while we do showcase fun spring produce—like asparagus, rhubarb, fava beans, and leafy greens—our Seattle springs are still relatively cold and dark, so we also want to continue to provide warm and cozy options, like our new soup starter."

The menu embraces popular spring ingredients, like sweet peas, radishes, lamb, ham, a variety of leafy greens, spring mushrooms, lemon, and lavender, and these ingredients show up in a variety of ways, from classics like risotto and roasted vegetables to unique starters such as Scallion Artichoke Fritters with lemon tahini sauce and Cucumber Gazpacho with almond dill gremolata.



Mai Tai: aged rum, overproof rum, lime juice, orgeat, and triple sec, garnished with a lime wheel and flaming sugar cube

Desserts take inspiration from the change in season, too. The Fromage Blanc Panna Cotta with fresh strawberries is the Tuxedo and Tennis Shoes teams' favorite addition. Light and fresh flavors announce the coming of warmer weather!

Of course, beverages also get a refresh in spring. Elderflower, mint, and citrus reflect the shift from winter to spring.

Being on top of your region's taste trends is one of the best ways to connect with your clients when the time comes to talk about their catering needs.

Read our [2023 Fall Issue](#) to learn more about seasonal menus.

Enjoy these refreshing new menu ideas!

Opposite page, top row from left: Lamb skewer with apricot thyme chutney; lemongrass pork skewer with tangy nuoc cham; Gold Rush cocktail with bourbon, honey syrup, lemon juice, garnished with a lemon twist

Middle row: Scofflaw cocktail with rye whiskey, dry vermouth, lemon juice, grenadine, and orange bitters; Honey harissa carrots with whipped feta and crispy chickpeas; Seared bistro filet with black garlic demi-glace

Bottom row: Blueberry cheesecake squares alongside Fromage Blanc Panna Cotta with fresh strawberries; Gin Rickey cocktail with gin, soda water, lime juice, garnished with lime wheels; Fresh vegetable crudité, house fried potato chips, and horseradish fava bean dip





FOOD FOR FÊTES



Blueberry cheesecake squares alongside Fromage Blanc Panna Cotta with fresh strawberries



Seared thyme brined chicken breast, rosé & pink peppercorn gastrique



Grilled coulotte steak on ciabatta, Mama Lil's peppers, dijonnaise, and baby arugula



Grilled eggplant, lemon tofu ricotta, marinara, crushed fava bean & basil purée, and pine nuts



There are many ways to incorporate the flavors of the changing seasons into a menu.



FOOD FOR FÊTES



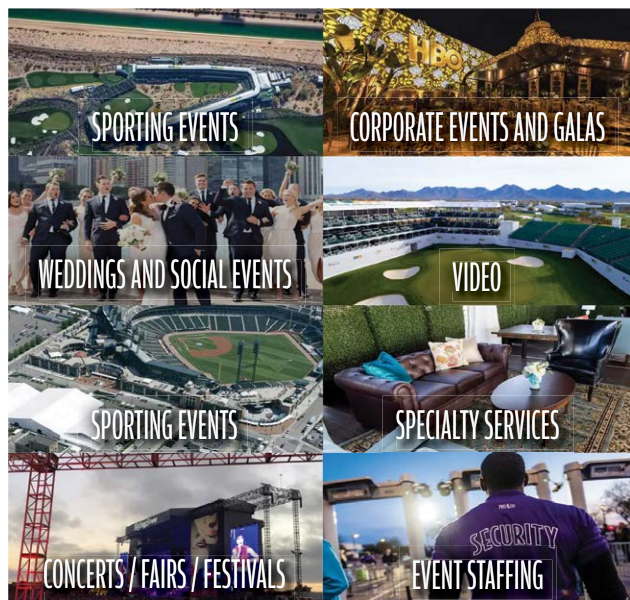
Ancho chili chicken
flautas, cotija, and
avocado crema



Hemingway Special: white rum, grapefruit juice, lime juice, maraschino liqueur, and demarara syrup



Smoked paprika marinated chickpea & couscous salad, fresh cucumber, tomato, and feta



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Brian Green (By BrianGreen) educated a packed room for his session, *Applying the Principles of Color Theory to Elevate Your Events*.

Speaker Salute!

We at Catersource + The Special Event 2024, as well as Art of Catering Food, want to offer a big thank you to our outstanding speakers and DICED Competition competitors.

Without the support of our generous speakers and their time, talent, and wise words, we could not offer our attendees the unforgettable educational experience that we do. **We salute them here:**

Aaron Price	Alyson Zildjian	Art Menchaca	Bryan Butler
Adrienne Harris	Amanda Mora	Ashley Scobey	Bryan Neuschaefer
Adrienna McDermott	Anca Trifan, CMP, DES	Bobbi Brinkman	Bryce Cherven
AJ Williams	Andre Howell	Bobby Bradley	Carl Sacks
Alan Berg, CSP	Andre Johnson	Bobby Dutton	Carlos Madrigal
Alicia Falango	Andrew Krause	Boris Seymore	Cathy O'Connell
Alicia Miller	Anthony Bollotta	Borja Rosales	Cazoshay Marie
Alicia Smith	Anthony Lambatos	Brad Snyder	Charessa Sawyer
Allie Piazza	Armando Seledon, CSEP, CTA	Brian Green	Charles Haracz

Chip Dizard

Chris Heffernan

Chris Sanchez

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Christie Osborne

Christopher Taylor

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Clint Upchurch

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Conner Black

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Jay Varga

JC York



Rob Barber (ATOMIC) shared his wisdom over the years in *From Napkin Sketch to Show Day: What 14 Years, 12 Product Lines, 110 Products & 28,802 Shows Have Taught Me*.



BizBash founder David Adler, in his session *Setting the Stage for Event Serendipity*, discussed event trends and evolving ideas for 2024.



Miro Diamanté got everyone involved in *Pop Culture and Sales, What's the Tea?*

Speaker Salute!



Opening General Session Keynote Laura Schwartz (Laura Schwartz Live) was a hit among attendees.

Jean Claude Etienne

Jeff Ware

Jeffrey Schlissel

Jeffrey Selden

Jen Bertolino

Jen Sulak

Jen Trotter

Jeniffer Bello

Jennifer Best

Jennifer Perna

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John Serock

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Julia Kendrick Conway

Kaitlyn Dineen

Karen O'Connor

Katie Mast

Keith Lord

Keith Sarasin

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Nettie Frank

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Norma Charette White

Patrick Peel, CHE

Paul Buchanan

Peter McCaffrey

Phoebe Hernick

Phuoc Vo

Rajan Mistry

Randi Steinhart

Reid Hubick

Renée Sabo

Renee Schuler

Reuben Bell

Rich Rosendale,
Master Chef

Rich Shank

Rob Barber

Robert “BJ” Beisler

Robert Mendoza

Robin Hoh

Robin Selden

Ron Ben-Israel

Roy Porter

Ryan Corvaia

Ryan Crafts

Ryan Whitten

Sally Webb

Scott Frankel

Sean Dent

Sebastien Centner

Sébastien David

Shannon Tarrant

Shaunelle Murphy

Sierra Reed

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CSEP

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Vanessa Vass

Vijay Goel

Warren Dietel

Yaron Lipshitz

Zohe Felici

AS SEEN IN

Austin

Tradeshow floor offers education and ideas at CS+TSE

By Amanda Nicklaus

All photos courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions/SpotMyPhotos

The tradeshow floor at [Catersource](#) + [The Special Event](#), held in Austin, TX this past February 12–15, was an exciting place, bustling with products, services, people, education sessions, and competitions.

Exhibitor Booths

Each year, attendees can look forward to certain eye-catching booths, like the stilted, extravagant costumed atmosphere talent of Pzazz Productions and the murals of Paintillio. This year, there were other attention-grabbing booth features as well, like the neon cowboys of Champagne Creative Group (turn to page 104 to see them in action at the Opening Night Party), cowboy hat airbrushing of AGNYC Productions, and logoed cake pops of Tripleseat.



Chef Rubber's sailor theme caught attendees' eyes.



Clockwise showed of walkers in

An Austin-tradeshow opportunity

Bright Eve elegant dir

Champagne the "Neon Opening N colorful co

AGNYC Pr cowboy ha Texas sou

Bar-a-la-Ca patterned





from left: Pzazz Productions
of rose bedecked stilt
honor of Valentine's Day.

themed airstream on the
floor provided a fun photo
y.

nt Rentals displayed an
ing setup.

he Creative Group borrowed
Spur" theme of the
light Party, where these
owboys performed.

roductions airbrushed
ats at their booth for a fun
venir.

art displayed a brightly
mobile bar.



AS SEEN IN

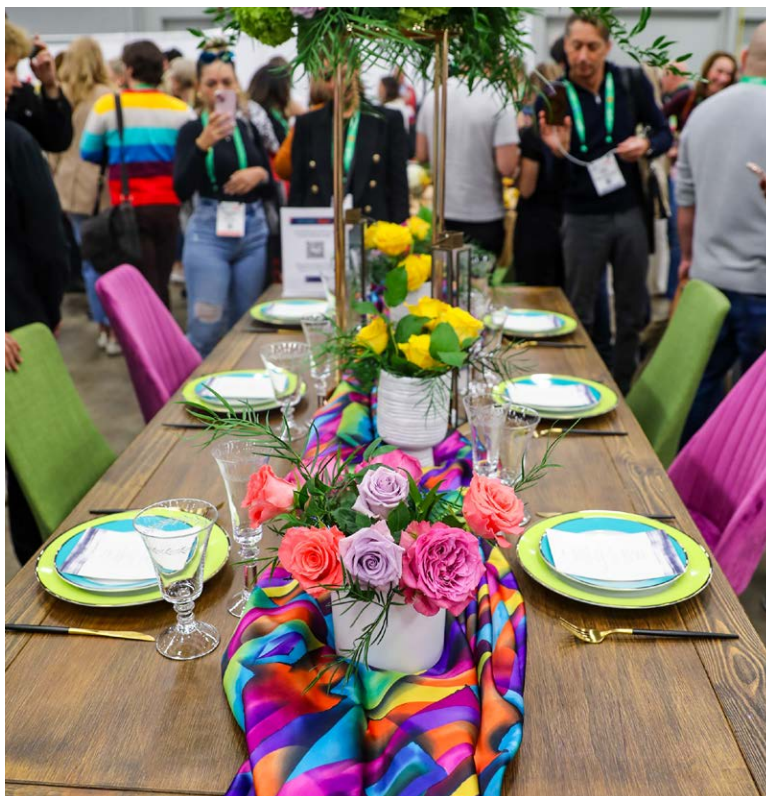
Austin

Tablescape Competition

The annual Tablescape Competition drew a crowd and got the creative juices flowing on the tradeshow floor. Sixty participants broke into teams, received a design prompt (following the formula of a celebrity client and an event scenario), and had limited time to design and build their tables. The competition was co-chaired and judged by Michelle Howard (Flora Couture), Colton Staver (The JDK Group), and Matthew Crowe (Hilton Norfolk The Main), and also judged by Laura Schwartz (Laura Schwartz Live) and Ron Ben-Israel (Ron Ben-Israel Cakes). All the tables were colorful, resourceful, and a delight to behold!



There were several styles of tables and chairs participants were assigned to work with, like this set of cocktail tables pushed together.



Clockwise patterns are seen at the competition.

This table uses an array of threading, yellow, and

Several tables of rich textures catching a

Spectators shoot photos of winning tables.





from left: Many bold and bright colors could be seen at this year's Tablescape Competition.

Each team made excellent use of an analogous color scheme, combining orange, yellow, and yellow green.

Many designers used plenty of greenery to create an eye-catching aesthetic.

Teams were encouraged to incorporate all the entries. The competition used vibrantly

colored dishware and linens, as well as lush greens for the centerpiece.

Participants had a limited amount of time to assemble their design.

Each team worked together to identify the florals and decor they wanted to use, then build the look as quickly as they could.

The color green made its way into nearly all of the designs, even if it was a small touch, like these green hydrangeas woven into a mostly orange color scheme.



AS SEEN IN

Austin

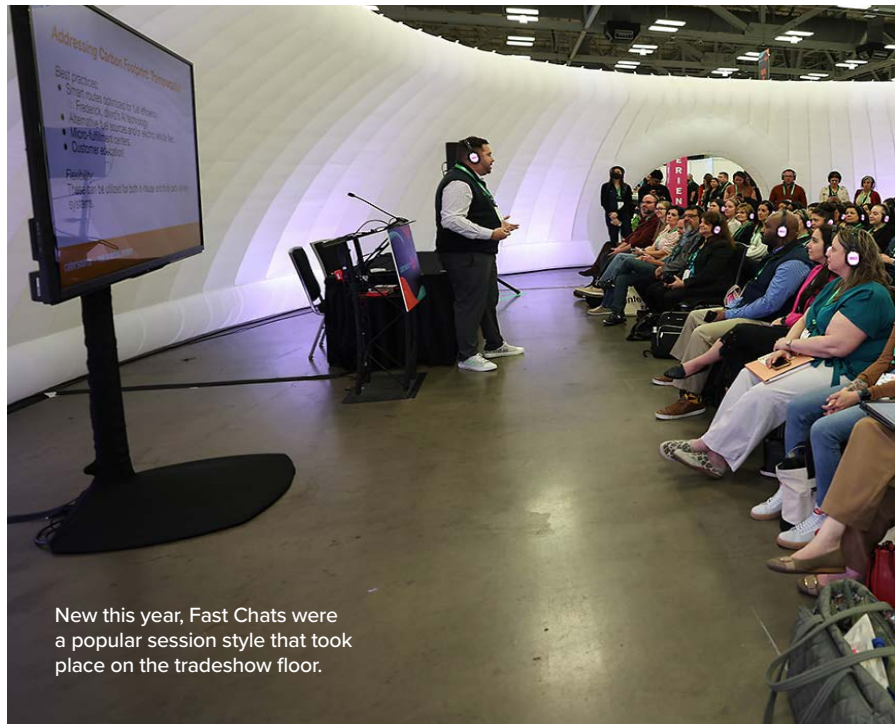
New this year, the Ignite Stages on the tradeshow floor featured 30-minute interactive Fast Chats, where attendees could discuss targeted topics with industry experts. With headsets and inside inflatable “igloos,” each session was up close and personal, offering a greater opportunity to understand and learn a variety of topics, from sustainability to technology to marketing to operations.

Events

There were several events happening on the floor throughout the week, as well including a happy hour, a morning Brunch & Bubbly, and booth awards, which honored exhibitors for different elements of their booths. No matter where attendees went, there was always something to experience! ●

With so much to do and see, the tradeshow floor at Catersource + The Special Event is an opportunity that can't be missed. Make sure to be in the middle of the action next year, when Catersource + The Special Event heads to Fort Lauderdale, FL, from February 24-27. Until next year!

Live from the tradeshow floor! Podcasts such as Tracy Stuckrath's (shown, right) *Eating at a Meeting* created a buzz, especially when high value interviewees like CS+TSE keynote Laura Schwartz (left) stopped by for a chat.

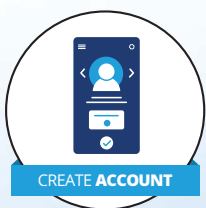




The tradeshow floor is always an inspiring place to connect with professionals across the catering and special events industries looking for the latest products and services to enhance their business operations and gather ideas together.

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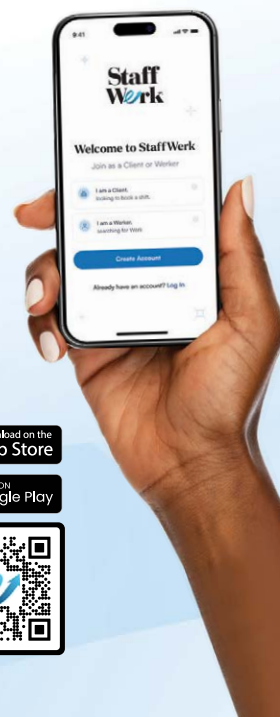
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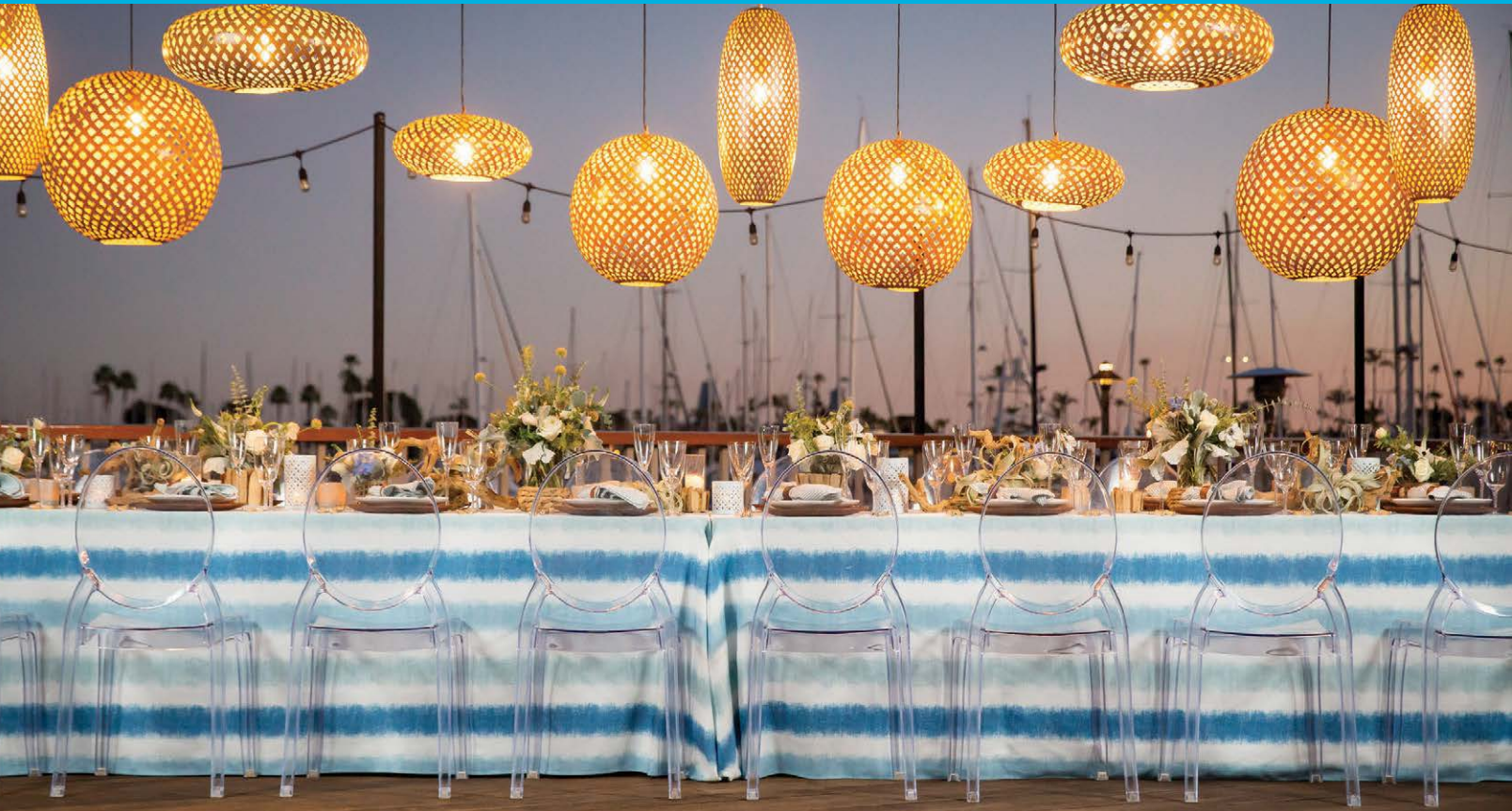
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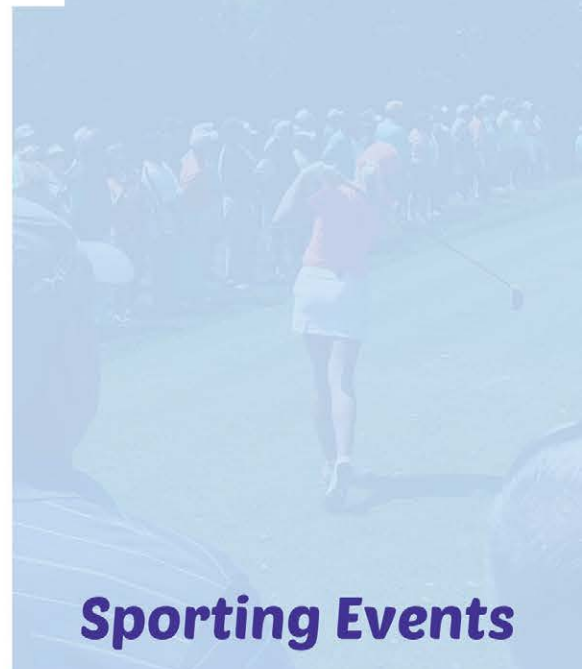




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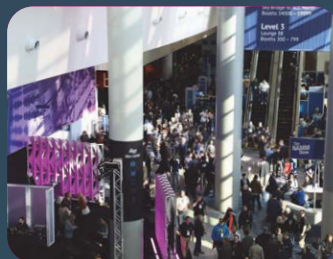
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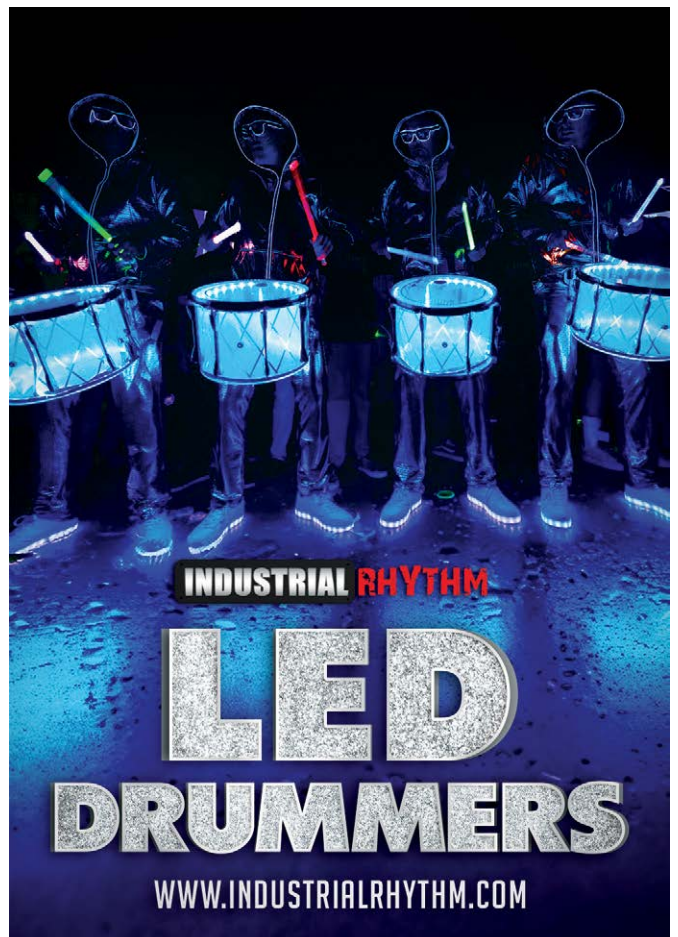


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A Dance in the Clouds



CONFETTI

The 2024 Gala Award recipient for Best Wedding brings momentary peace & cultural unity amidst troubled times

By Amanda Nicklaus

*All photos courtesy Andres Schram Photography/
Corrina Walker Photography*

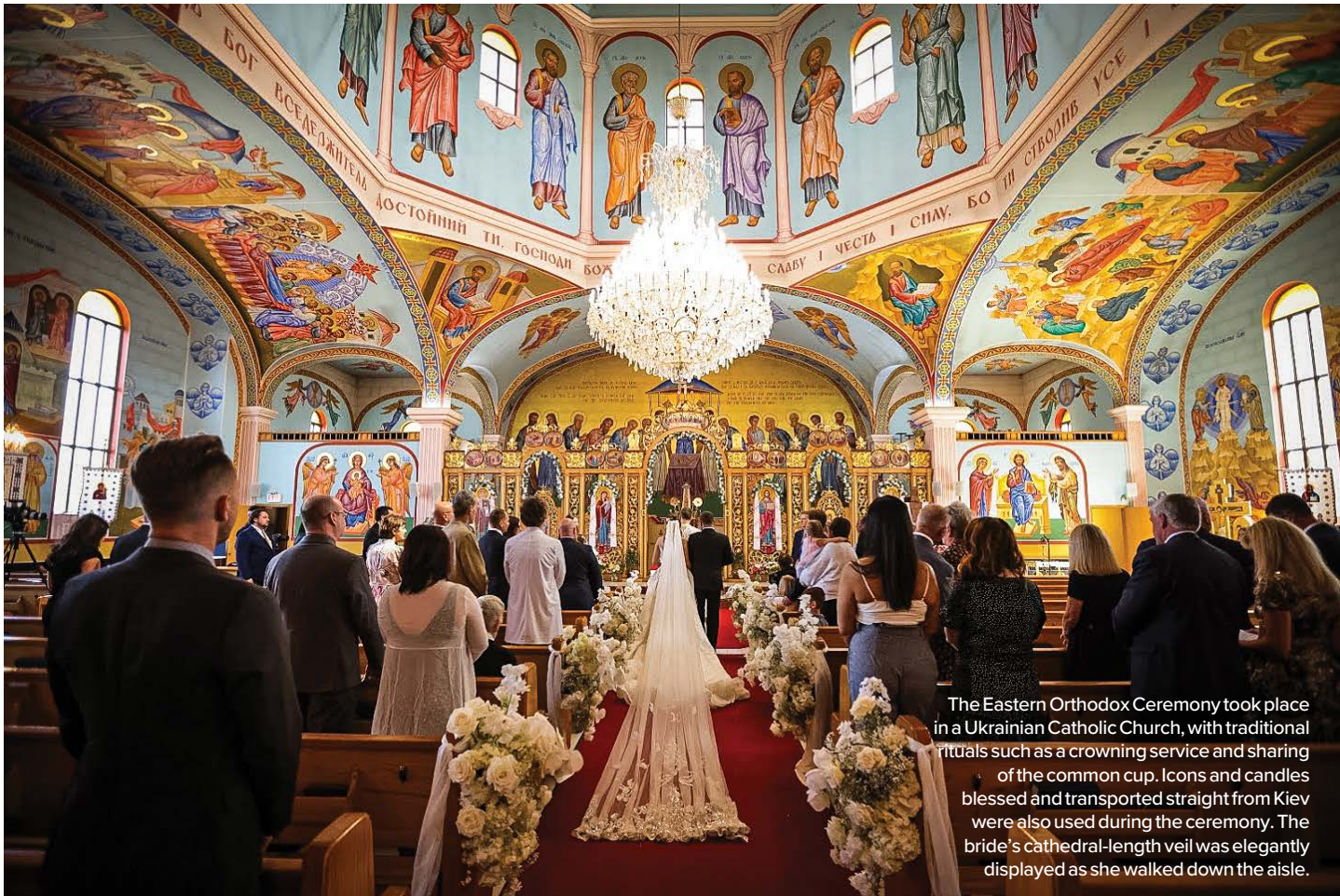
It's difficult enough to plan a wedding in three months. It's even more difficult when you must plan that wedding for a high-profile couple with national security needs, wide internet visibility, and strict cultural guidelines. Yet that is exactly what Lynn Fletcher Weddings did when their clients came to them, and the results were not simply satisfying—they were outstanding.

The Ukrainian couple wanted to keep everything as Ukrainian as possible to show support for their homeland, which is also why they chose the theme “A Dance in the Clouds,” in hopes that their wedding would provide a moment of peace from the war with a feeling of stepping into a magical fairytale. They also used the wedding as an opportunity to raise funds for reconstruction back home.

Because of the couple's high-profile careers, there were a plethora of hoops to jump through. To start, the groom was an important political figure in Ukraine, and many of their guests were as well. There were also several Ukrainian celebrities in attendance. This meant intense security needed to be provided on the big day, with 24/7 surveillance. It also meant that, since the wedding took place in Canada, guests needed permission to attend from President Zelenskyy himself—and due to changing war situations, many were not granted that permission, including the bride's parents.

In contrast with the groom's need for privacy, the bride's career as a well-known influencer meant that many moments during the big day needed to be shared

For the first dance, dry ice fog machines created a blanket of thick low-lying fog, which was illuminated by the LED dance floor. Eight cold spark machines were used to create a wall of sparkles, and the timing of the dance was synced with the setting of the sun to capture that golden hour magic.



The Eastern Orthodox Ceremony took place in a Ukrainian Catholic Church, with traditional rituals such as a crowning service and sharing of the common cup. Icons and candles blessed and transported straight from Kiev were also used during the ceremony. The bride's cathedral-length veil was elegantly displayed as she walked down the aisle.

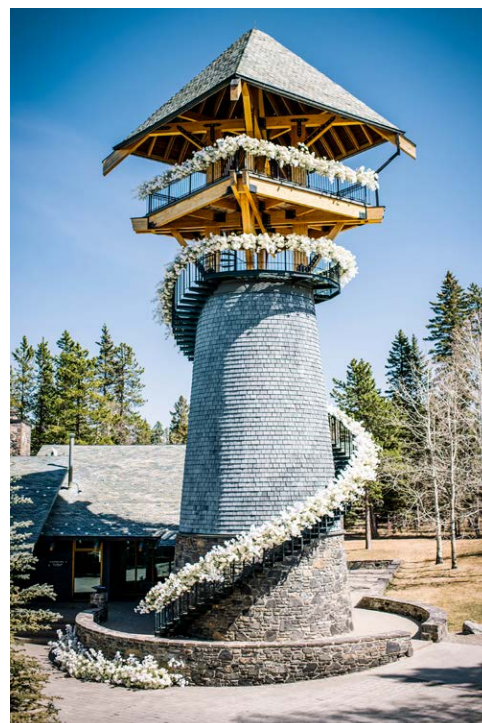
Since the wedding took place in Canada, guests needed permission to attend from President Zelenskyy himself.

online to support her personal brand. The Lynn Fletcher team developed ways for her to go live throughout the day and share the activities with her audience while keeping her connected and in the moment, but also protecting the privacy of guests.

There were other details the team had to lock down before the deadline, too: serving champagne during a shortage, as well as serving vodka that was supplied by Ukrainian sympathizers—which was tricky considering the venue's



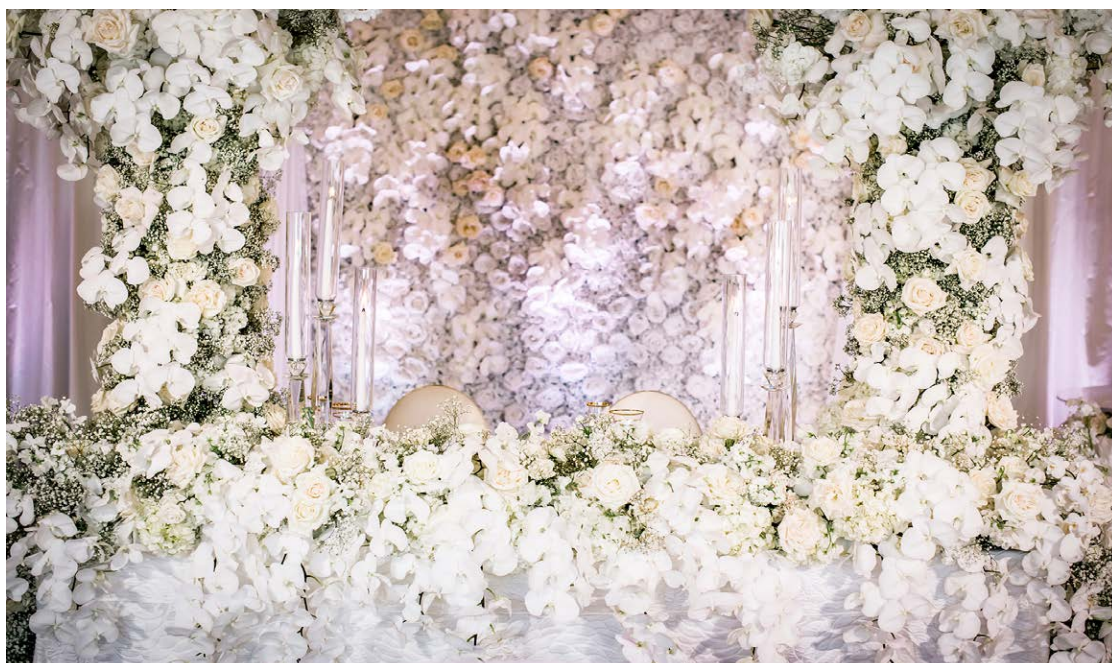
In line with the fairytale wedding theme, the seven-tiered cake was complete with a fairytale castle, and a horse-drawn carriage added just the right amount of romance to the cake topper.



Above: A 50-foot water tower at the venue was an imposing backdrop to display 375 feet of florals that spiraled from the ground all the way to the upper tier.

Left: A champagne seating wall invited guests to find their seats as they made their way into dinner.

Below: A floral wall was erected behind the sweetheart table, with uplights shining and florals spilling over the front edge.



CONFETTI



in-house vodka was a Russian brand. The team managed to import Nemiroff, a Ukrainian vodka, just in time. Then, there was the matter of training the catering team on authentic Ukrainian cuisine; of finding a bakery who would make a seven-tier cake last-minute; of finding a Ukrainian DJ; and then, of finding a replacement emcee with knowledge of the nuances of Ukrainian culture when the original emcee was deployed. The team even had to hire an electrical engineer to divert power and prevent the breakers from tripping, because the venue was an old private residence not fit for the high-tech effects the team was planning. Finally, the groom's father had a terminal illness that meant the venue had to be wheelchair-accessible, and the team hired a local company to come in to make venue modifications, ensuring the day could be enjoyable for everyone.

Somehow, the team pulled everything off.

The wedding was truly "A Dance in the Clouds" starting with the enchanting, hand-delivered invitations with



A photo op installation was set up featuring a floral gazebo featuring two gold chandeliers cascaded down the sides of the archway.



The tablescapes were luxurious, featuring laser-cut napkin rings designed to hold a two-page menu with a gold border.

Above: Custom photo op installations were fabricated for social media content, including a six-foot, 700-lb. heart covered in florals. Two gold floor chandeliers flanked the heart on each side and a semi-circle of florals with cylinder candles completed the look.



...t up on site in the form
...nky light strands that
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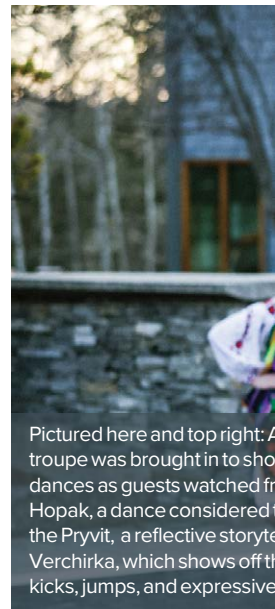
Textured white floral linens created visual interest
to the guest tables, which were set aglow with
candles of multiple heights and styles.

CONFETTI



artisan chocolates. The venue was decorated with dramatic, cascading flower arrangements. A local Ukrainian dance troupe was brought in to perform three traditional dances. To bring home the magical moment of peace and happiness, the dance floor was set with fog machines, and the couple, who had been taking lessons for eight weeks, danced along an enchanting, cloudy dance floor, marking a magical, dreamy moment of their love and life together. ●

Ukrainian LED Dancers were incorporated into the evening performance as guests transitioned from dinner to dancing. A gobo constellation was projected onto the ceiling to add visual interest to the space and draw the eyes of the guests upward, shifting the mood as the night progressed.



Pictured here and top right: A troupe was brought in to show dances as guests watched from the Hopak, a dance considered the Pryvit, a reflective story of Verchirka, which shows off the kicks, jumps, and expressive



The couple sealed their wedding kiss as a laser light show danced



No attention to detail was missed which highlighted the building as the day turned to night and outside for a walk or a cigar at adventurous enough to climb



A local Ukrainian dance showcase three traditional from their seats: the the heartbeat of Ukraine; telling dance; and the the performers with high arms.



ing day with a ed above them.

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The dance floor was designed to feel like guests were stepping onto one of the hottest nightclubs. Lynn Fletcher Weddings used a variety of lighting elements from the LED dance floor that changed colors and patterns to the light tubes surrounding the DJ podium that danced in sync to the music.



Out with the Old,



In with the New

HOW TO CREATE TRADITIONS THAT ARE AUTHENTIC & RESPECTFUL WHILE BEING MEMORABLE

By Amanda Nicklaus


When most people picture a wedding, they probably think of traditions that have been passed down over time: cutting a cake, tossing a bouquet, smashing a glass, jumping a broom, performing a specific dance. But in 2024, younger couples are taking a new approach to traditions, either updating them to fit their personal values and identity, or else tossing them out completely in favor of creating new rituals.

“2024 is going to continue to see couples planning weddings that fit their vision for their celebration, forgoing traditions, norms, and expectations that don’t align with their priorities,” Mara Mazdzer (WIPA, Fuse Weddings) predicted in *Special Events’ 2023 Positive Predictions*. “Couples will continue to nix traditional elements like parent dances or dads walking daughters down the aisle if their family dynamics make that complicated. Cake cuttings, bouquet tosses, and garter tosses will also continue to dwindle in frequency as couples settle into planning an event that feels like an authentic reflection of them.”

As more couples look to create new, personalized rituals, the onus falls on planners to forge meaningful and responsible practices. With the right mindset and a lot of innovation, new traditions can be an outlet to showcase your creativity as a planner and help your clients have a wedding that feels right for them in every way.

Turning back time

All traditions started out as an intentional gesture, even if the original significance has been lost over time. Some traditions, like tying cans to the back of the newlyweds’ car, have easily traceable origins, while others, like breaking

A bride and groom are shown in a romantic embrace, kissing. The bride is wearing a white, tiered wedding dress and holding a large bouquet of white and pink flowers. The groom is wearing a light blue shirt and dark pants, with a visible tattoo on his left arm. They are standing next to a large, round wedding cake decorated with white flowers. The background is dark and rustic, with wooden beams visible.

Left: Some traditions, like tying cans to the back of the newlyweds’ car, have easily traceable origins—but perhaps don’t serve the same purpose they once did.

Above: Sometimes, the best way to go forward is to look to the past, which is why vintage cakes are becoming popular. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy MC Weddings



“2024 is going to continue to see couples planning weddings that fit their vision for their celebration, forgoing traditions, norms, and expectations that don't align with their priorities.”

Mara Mazdzer, Owner and Creative Director of Fuse Weddings and Immediate Past President of WIPA



Couples are starting to gift bouquets instead of doing the traditional toss.

porcelain plates, are “often impossible to trace,” says history professor Joel F. Harrington in a recent article for the [New York Times](#).

Whether or not the origins are traceable, wedding traditions found their place in ceremonies as visual and auditory demonstrations, the article says, quoting Claire Stewart, an author and associate professor of hospitality management. She says that these acts are “a disruption to indicate this is a special day and is to be remembered.”

As the function of marriage has changed, and as society and culture itself has shifted and been influenced by global connection and social media, many of these ancient rituals no longer resonate with couples, and in some cases, they are outdated enough to cause discomfort. “It’s possible that couples are forgoing past wedding traditions because they do not feel connected to them in any way,” suggests Kimberly Sisti (SISTI & CO). “As years fly by, the intended reasoning behind certain traditions can be lost, thus inviting new traditions to crop up instead.”

Family dynamics, gender inclusivity and equality, heritage appreciation, and social media trends all play a role in determining whether longstanding traditions remain significant or in desperate need of an upgrade.

For example, bouquet tosses are being replaced by bouquet regifting to destigmatize singleness. Wedding parties are ditching gender separation while embracing gender neutral language, and couples are opting for wedding attire that lets them express their personalities more than traditional garb allows.

“We’ve always said that tradition is just peer pressure from dead people,” says wedding photographer Megan Breukelman (Megan & Kenneth). “While the core of a Western wedding ceremony has remained mostly the same over the years, the venues and scripts have adjusted for modern times. Many traditions we see now are evolutions from older ideas—like best men ensuring the bride’s family couldn’t re-capture a stolen bride from a ceremony. Nowadays, their focus is typically ensuring the rings stay on-site. Like any event, weddings are simply modernizing and adjusting traditions to fit the couple best.”

Even if traditions aren't necessarily problematic, culture has dictated the intense personalization of events.

"Couples are looking to put their own spin on traditions and refresh them," Heather Balliet (Amorology Weddings) told [The New York Times](#). "They want to update and personalize them while holding onto remnants."

Ian Ramirez (Madeira Estates) echoes this sentiment. "As Gen Z has established itself as the dominating presence in the wedding scene in 2024, we are seeing [couples] throw out the pressures from their parents, grandparents, and previous generations to conform to the 'old ways' in favor of traditions that show off their personalities and increase their 'likes' amongst friends and followers."

Creating new traditions

The best place to start when crafting new rituals is with your couple's individual story: who they are as a person, what they value, where they live, their heritage, how they met, and what is important in their relationship. What traditions were passed down in their families? What symbolizes their love story? Getting a handle on what makes your couple unique is the first step in personalizing their wedding.

"To infuse elements with special meaning or significance to the couple, it is important to identify and integrate aspects that hold personal importance in their relationship. This may include incorporating shared memories, inside jokes, or personal symbols that evoke a sense of intimacy and nostalgia," says Sebastien



Above: Today's couples want to express themselves fully, which means finding wedding fashion that isn't the traditional tux and white gown. Some wedding outfitters provide nonbinary garb as well. Attire and photo courtesy Loulette Bride

Left: Vintage elements are often upgraded with a touch of modern. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy MC Weddings

Centner (Eatertainment Events & Catering). “Additionally, a key consideration in the wedding planning process involves avoiding trends that might not resonate with the unique identity of the couple. By steering clear of popular fads and focusing on elements that authentically reflect the couple's personality, the wedding can become a more genuine and memorable celebration of their love and connection.”

Special Events got in contact with Amorology Weddings and found they take a similar approach. “We typically ask our couples if there are things they want to hold onto that are meaningful to them and think of ways in which we can reinvent those time-honored traditions. In creating new ones, we love taking an organic part of the couple's story to plan upon and create a new tradition that brings joy for many years to come.”

Heritage is becoming an especially strong marker in the couple's personal story.

“In a world that is becoming increasingly diverse, many couples are choosing to celebrate their cultural heritage by incorporating it into their wedding theme,” says an article from [Traveler's Q](#). (Turn to page 84 for a deep dive into a Gala Award-receiving Ukrainian heritage wedding.) “In 2024, we expect to see this trend evolve further with more fusion weddings, where couples blend elements from different cultures to create a unique and meaningful celebration. This could range from incorporating traditional attire or customs from both cultures to serving food from different cuisines. These weddings not only bring two families together but also showcase the beauty of diversity and inclusion.”

Meena Lee-DePasquale, the owner and designer at 5th Avenue Weddings & Events, talked to the [New York Times](#) about how she helps couples incorporate their cultures into modern celebrations. She's planned weddings that combine Indian and Quaker heritage, as well as Jewish and Chinese celebrations. One wedding

Below: Saying goodbye to traditions means ditching outdated gender norms. Today's wedding parties are made up of loved ones, no matter their gender. Photo courtesy Steve Steinhardt





The couple in this fusion wedding mixed traditional East Indian garb with wedding attire more often seen in the U.S. Photo courtesy Ayesha Hakki

combined Hawaiian Japanese and American Latin cultures. “We had custom sake cups made for each guest to do the traditional Hawaiian banzai toast and served musubi during cocktail hour, as well as had cherry blossom centerpieces,” she said in the article.

Traditions can take on new life when the original intent is placed in a personalized, modernized context that resonates with the couple but still holds true to its essential meaning. Ultimately, studying the background of a ritual is the best place to start, and communication between all parties is key to telling the right story.

“Understanding the significance of traditional elements involves a thoughtful exploration of which aspects can be modified or replaced to better align with the couple’s vision for their wedding day,” Centner continues. “Collaborative efforts between couples, wedding planners, and other stakeholders are essential in the process, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and the implementation of innovative concepts. Furthermore, a key aspect of this approach involves incorporating personal elements into the celebration, such as shared hobbies, interests, or meaningful experiences, to add a distinctly intimate and authentic touch to the wedding festivities.”



“We are seeing [couples] throw out the pressures from their parents, grandparents, and previous generations to conform to the ‘old ways’ in favor of traditions that show off their personalities.”

Ian Ramirez, Venue
Director of Madera
Estates



Above: Traditional venues aren't for everyone: unique ceremony spaces are part of the process in personalizing weddings. Shown here: The Little Daisy by Open Venues, a first-of-its-kind platform that helps users book rare and historic properties. Photo courtesy Open Venues



Above: On the rise: vintage cakes. As couples rethink traditions, certain styles of the past are timeless enough to make a comeback. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy Shannon Moffit

With great creativity comes great responsibility

Borrowing or updating cultural traditions does come with responsibility. It's important to avoid cultural appropriation, which "takes place when members of a majority group adopt cultural elements of a minority group in an exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical way," according to [Britannica](#). Put more simply, it is the "inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society" (Oxford Languages).

If there are certain traditions that your couple wants to embrace, whether passed down or adopted, it's important to understand as best you can the origin of that tradition and determine whether or not it accurately reflects the couple's identity.

Besides heritage, your couple's religious affiliations are important to consider. And for white couples, certain rituals may seem fun to adopt but often hold deeper meaning that doesn't fit into their own identity.

"As you're looking for new ritual elements, you start to consider ideas like jumping over the broom, getting ornate Mehndi, or smashing glass," reflects wedding writer [Najva Sol](#). "They seem like meaningful symbols, and great 'replacements,' mainly because they don't come with the religious burden of your own spiritual community. But the kicker is those are other people's religious and spiritual rituals.

"Chances are, you don't even understand the nuances of what those (often religious, always sacred) rituals represent. Jumping the broom is about slaves not having the legal right to marry. Smashing the glass represents the destruction of the second temple, and the responsibility to Tikkun Olam—repairing the world. Hula dancing is traditionally only done by men and accompanied by creation myths."

Sol encourages white couples to dig deeper into their heritage and identify where their traditions came from. “I keep hearing some version of ‘but I have no culture...’ when it comes to wedding planning, and I’m here to definitively say: you do. And it’s not even boring, I promise. As someone foreign to white culture, I know with complete certainty that you have a culture, because I live in it, and it’s not mine,” says Sol, who is Iranian American.

Other things to avoid

There are plenty of feathers to be ruffled when ditching timeless rituals and creating new ones. Here are a few things to navigate that might crop up as a result of pioneering new traditions:

Family drama

When tossing out timeless traditions, you can expect to cause a stir, especially within the couple’s immediate family.

“Disregarding the feelings of close family members without offering an explanation can lead to misunderstandings and strained relationships during the wedding planning process,” explains Centner. “It is essential to communicate openly about decisions and provide context to ensure that everyone feels heard and understood.”

As always, difficult yet open conversation is necessary in navigating conflict brought on by making significant wedding changes. “Engaging in open and respectful communication is crucial when explaining the reasons behind any changes made to traditional elements of a wedding,” continues Centner. “It involves transparently sharing the motivations and considerations that led to these modifications.”

He recommends helping upset family members to understand why the couple is making significant changes. “Emphasizing the significance of crafting a wedding that genuinely reflects the couple’s unique identity is essential in garnering understanding and support from family members. Additionally, finding compromises that strike a balance and meet the desires of both the couple and their families is a diplomatic approach to navigating potential conflicts and ensuring a harmonious wedding planning process.”

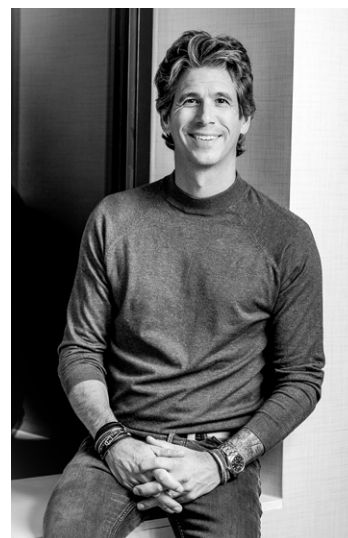
The folks at Amorology Weddings resort to compromise when necessary. “We occasionally find couples who don’t want a grand cake cutting but we have met in the middle with their parents and done a private cake cutting so that family gets the best of both worlds!”

Doing too much

Simple is better when crafting new traditions. “Overcomplicating rituals runs the risk of diluting the essence of what makes them special,” says Centner. “Simplifying and preserving the core elements of meaningful traditions can contribute to a more focused and emotionally resonant wedding ceremony, allowing the couple to cherish the significance of each ritual without unnecessary complexity.”

Destination damage

A feature for [Condé Nast Traveler](#) warns against mishandling local culture when planning a destination wedding. “Weaving into a celebration the markers of a culture, particularly when it’s one you don’t have personal ties to, can feel like both an exercise in ethics and a course in anthropology. How do you translate a place that you may not know that well to your guests? And where does the line



“By steering clear of popular fads and focusing on elements that authentically reflect the couple’s personality, the wedding can become a more genuine and memorable celebration of their love and connection.”

Sebastien Centner,
Founder and Creative
Director of Eatertainment
Events & Catering

between what is respectful, tasteful, and even interesting, give way to the kitschy or appropriative?”

To start, understanding local traditions is key. Bringing your usual approach to a destination is less than tasteful, according to Fallon Carter (Fallon Carter Events). “When people try to take the place they’re from to the destination,” Carter says, “you miss out on all the atmosphere and magic a place has.”

Event pro Marcy Blum agrees. “You definitely don’t want to go into a place looking like, ‘Hello, we’re the Americans and we know how to do everything better than you, and we’re going to fly in our florist and designer,’” she says. “I don’t think it’s financially clever, or psychologically clever.”

Blum advises studying a destination’s local food and music or entertainment, and notes that “clothing and themed dress codes is not only a surefire way to teeter into cultural appropriation, but often are plain inaccurate portrayals of a place.

“There certainly are people who are on a yacht and they see Croatia and think, ‘Let’s have our wedding in Croatia, and then try to incorporate things like Croatian native dress for people at the reception,’” says Blum. “Which, as I try to explain to clients, nobody is walking around in those. It’s like going to Williamsburg and thinking the citizens are wearing pilgrim outfits. It’s not just appropriation, but absurd.”

Wedding designer Matthew Robbins (RobbinsOtoya) told *Condé Nast Traveler*, “It’s easy for couples to want to gravitate to a theme for a party in another country, because it’s just easy to attach to, but you don’t want it to feel overproduced or contrived. If you don’t have a heritage connection, it can even be a bit uncomfortable for your guests who are like: ‘Why are my friends suddenly doing this thing that has zero connection to them?’”

Below: A vibrant wedding welcome party for a destination wedding in Capri, Italy by Marcy Blum Associates. Photo courtesy Allan Zepeda





Left: Table-length cakes are gaining popularity as couples look for new ways to display food and beverage. Photo courtesy Bliss Katherine via *The New York Times*

Above: Some couples are forgoing guest books in favor of voice recording boxes—letting them hear sweet messages from their guests that will last a lifetime. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy This Modern Romance

New trends

2024 is starting off with some extra creative trends.

Here are just some of the trends being reported at the onset of 2024:

- Moving away from wedding parties
- Walking solo/as a couple down the aisle
- Hybrid weddings to include those not able to attend
- Unique and unconventional venues
- Integration of technology
- Elevated guest portraits
- Gifting the bouquet
- Digital voice recordings in place of guest books
- Desserts hanging from the ceiling
- Ditching the sweetheart's table and sitting the couple with family
- Vintage-style cakes
- [Table-length sheet cakes](#)

Above information courtesy [OFD Consulting](#) and [The New York Times](#)

“Instead of recreating a ritual you aren’t connected to, consider having someone local officiate the wedding,” Carter says, “and briefly explain to guests the elements of local rituals and customs, or beliefs about marriage that they hold—it’ll be more interesting, and informative, anyway.”

New trends for 2024

2024 is rife with new wedding trends that will undoubtedly become swaps for many longstanding traditions. Before rushing to promote new trends, however, make sure what’s popular is also meaningful to your couples.

“Making changes solely for the sake of trends, without considering their personal significance to the couple, may result in a wedding that lacks authenticity,” says Centner. “It is crucial to prioritize elements that hold meaning for the couple rather than succumbing to fleeting trends, ensuring a more genuine and lasting celebration of their union.”



“Clothing and themed dress codes is not only a surefire way to teeter into cultural appropriation, but often are plain inaccurate portrayals of a place.”

Marcy Blum, owner of
[Marcy Blum Associates](#)





That being said, many rising wedding trends are excellent things to incorporate into weddings this year, and can be presented as optional swaps to any couple.

Sarah Chianese (Mangia and Enjoy!) notes that social media will play a huge role in dictating these trends. “With social media influencing the last of the millennials and the entirely new generation, Gen Z, these couples seek ‘wow’ factors, immersive experiences for their guests, themes, and a celebration exhibiting their style and shared interests. Most of them have been exposed to social media outlets exhibiting hundreds of weddings posted [to accounts] over the last decade; it’s no longer a scenario where a couple has only witnessed weddings they’ve attended or seen on TV, in movies, or in wedding magazines. They have been inundated with visuals and ideas, even if it’s not a keyword they search for. As a result of this mass wedding stimulation, there is a goal to create their own story, provide a unique experience for their guests, and step out of tradition.”

Here’s your permission to get creative this year. Really get to know your couples and their story, and don’t be afraid to update, personalize, or completely toss out traditions that normally may seem essential to planning a wedding. With the right research, plenty of communication, and the courage to lean into self-expression, you can revitalize your planning approach and steer clear of stale rituals, bringing deep significance and satisfaction to your couples on their magical day. ●

Opposite page, top: One fun tradition we’ve been seeing more of: one or both of the wedding party chopping their locks once the ceremony ends. Photo courtesy A. Faith Arts via *The New York Times*

Opposite page, bottom: In 2021, bride Brittany Smith Gallant made headlines when a bridesmaid appeared as a hologram at her wedding. Now, only three years later, innovative tech is becoming a normal integration in weddings. Photo courtesy *AP News*

This page, top: Elegant, sophisticated guest portraits are replacing the cheeky, playful photo ops of previous years. Photo courtesy Portraits on White



LED light dancers, on LED-lit stages, bring stimulating entertainment to the crowd.



Drag performers that mingle on the dance floor are an easy crowd-pleaser.

Neon



Country music at a cowboy themed event is always appropriate.

n Spur Night



here are many reasons to attend Catersource + The Special Event, but one of the highlights is the evening events. These celebrations close out the days of education and networking with extravagant decor, engaging entertainment, astounding atmosphere talent, experiential food, and all the latest trends.

They're a place to kick back and have fun, but also to gather ideas for your upcoming events. This year's themes were strong, and perhaps the most embraced theme of the week, the "Neon Spur" Opening Night Party was a vibrant amalgamation of cowboy and bright colors. With atmosphere talent dressed in everything from Western gear to LED lighting to Dolly Parton-style drag, it was obvious that attendees were celebrating in Texas. One favorite from the night: cardboard cutouts of country legends—including Dolly Parton, Matthew McConaughey, and Willie Nelson—peeked out from corners of the venue as attendees grabbed photos with these icons.

Get inspired with all the little touches at an Opening Night Party that will make your guests say "Yeehaw!" ● —Amanda Nicklaus

All photos courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos

For more on theme events, turn to [page 26](#). For a look at all the trendy food at this exciting event, turn to page 10 in the adjoining *Catersource* magazine. **Turn to page 60 to see a full list of event sponsors.**



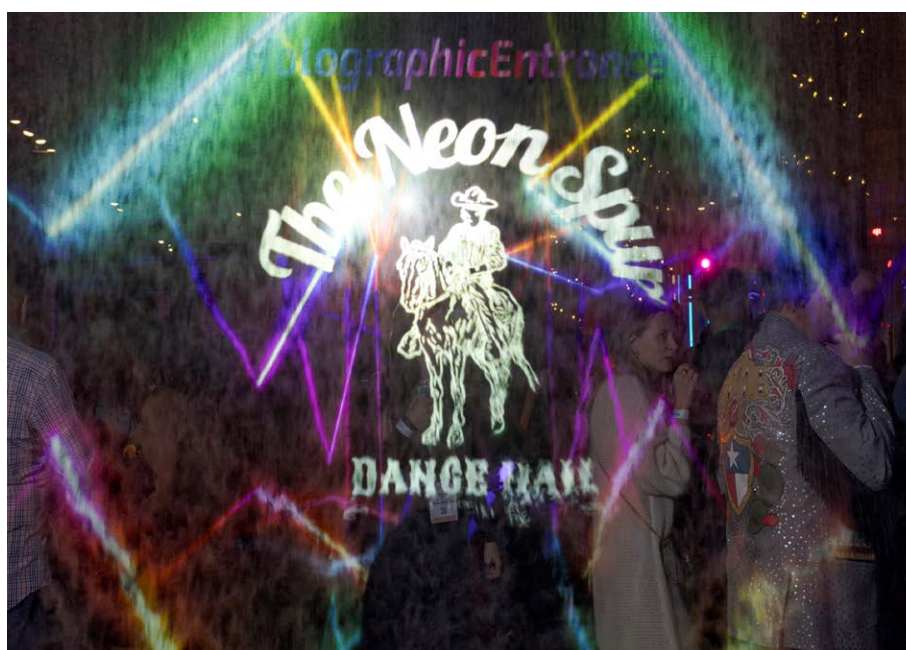
STEAL THIS



Maximalist ceiling treatments are a must (as are an LED drumline to bring up the energy).



Line dancers get the crowd onto the dance floor.



Fog entrances with logos and icon projections are a trendy way to welcome attendees.



STEAL THIS



All performers, like this aerial hoop performer, can dress on theme.



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A statement entrance announces the vibe




ent to reinforce theme colors.



e of the night.



Small florals become eye-catching with bright colors.



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CS+TSE serves as a catalyst for innovation, inspiration, and collaboration within the events industry.

A Wedding Pro's Reflections on Innovation & Growth at CS+TSE 2024

By Jackie Watson

The pulse of innovation echoed through the halls of Catersource + The Special Event 2024 (CS+TSE) in Austin, TX, as event professionals from across the globe gathered to immerse themselves in a world of endless possibilities. Against the backdrop of bustling creativity, attendees embraced a whirlwind of insights, inspirations, and networking opportunities that promised to reshape the landscape of the events industry.

For me, CS+TSE holds a significant place in the world of culinary artistry and event planning, leading the charge in this ongoing evolution. Its commitment to education, fostering innovation, and inspiring the industry's pioneers ignites a spark that resonates throughout the events industry. Each year I go, I am inspired by the many speakers I listen to. Here are a few of my takeaways from this year's show:

- * Amidst the vibrant symphony of event planning and catering sessions, a resounding theme emerged: the integration of artificial intelligence (AI). From personalized menu recommendations to seamless guest seating arrangements, event pros delved into the transformative power of AI in optimizing operations and enhancing the client's journey. Through immersive workshops and seminars, attendees acquired practical strategies to harness AI effectively, empowering them to lead the charge in a rapidly digitizing world.
- * Michael Cerbelli's: The Hot List™ emerged as a helpful resource for attendees eager to explore cutting-edge offerings shaping the future of both corporate and social realms. From groundbreaking catering solutions to avant-garde decor concepts, The Hot List™ curated an array of innovations poised to revolutionize conference and wedding day experiences alike.

* Beyond the excitement of innovation, CS+TSE fostered a culture of collaboration and camaraderie among attendees. Networking sessions offered rich soil for event pros to forge meaningful connections with peers and industry leaders alike. Through chance meetings and purposeful outreach, professionals explored collaborative ventures and partnership opportunities, broadening their horizons and discovering new paths for growth.

* This year, CS+TSE underscored the importance of self-care in the demanding landscape of the events industry. Amidst the whirlwind of entrepreneurship, attendees were reminded to establish boundaries, embrace resilience, and prioritize their mental well-being. Understanding that nurturing oneself enables one to better serve clients, the convention fostered an environment of growth and empowerment.

As I sit here and write this, I realize the true essence of CS+TSE's impact lies beyond the confines of its educational endeavors. It resides in what one walks away with—the essence of the spark ignited within. This spark is the newfound reverence for the artistry and significance embedded within every aspect of an event. It's the realization that each dish served, each flower arranged, and each moment curated holds the potential to etch indelible memories into a client's day.

CS+TSE serves as a catalyst for innovation, inspiration, and collaboration within the events industry. It brings together ideas, creativity, and teamwork in the event and conference world. As attendees leave with new ideas and friends, they're ready to make events even more magical for clients and guests. ●

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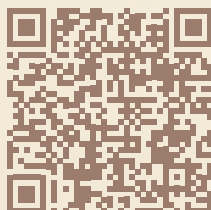
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We could not offer our attendees the unforgettable educational experience we do without the support of our generous speakers and their time, talent, and wise words



Behind the Cover

This month's cover comes from **Jeremy Langemann (Bingeman's Catering)** who delivered a session on Indigenous cuisine during this year's Art of Catering Food where he prepared a Maple-Cured Sweetgrass Smoked Steelhead accompanied by Corn Skillet Cakes, Saskatoon Berry Spread, and Puffed Rice & Fried Sage. Turn to page 56 for the recipe. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions Inc.; Salmon courtesy Sitka Seafood



Reaching the Apex

Not long ago I was in Texas, working three separate conferences in the span of five days. Were you there for any of them? The Art of Catering Food launched the mid-February week, with *Catersource* + The Special Event following on its heels.

In this issue of *Catersource*, we will cover many of the highlights of those inspiring shows, from trends seen to food tasted to the energy of the evening events. As you flip through these pages, I hope you gain inspiration for your own upcoming events, whether it's a new way of thinking about how you design your space or what you decide to put on a summer menu launch.

I have been covering trends for almost the entirety of my career in a variety of different industries and at some point, it feels to me as if we have reached the apex. Surely, there can't be anything else new or innovative! But as we all know, what goes around comes around and sure enough, drones appear, the '90s are cool again, and peach fuzz is the color of 2024 (see [page 90](#) for more on that, by the way), signifying that warmth and welcoming feeling of comfort and togetherness we all need as we head into election season.

What I love about our three shows is that, while we may be in a particular area of the country and we will embrace that aesthetic to a certain degree (I'll take any opportunity to wear my cowboy boots when in Texas or flip flops in February when in Fort Lauderdale—the site of our 2025 show) we showcase trends from throughout the world. We discussed indigenous cuisine as it relates to the Ontario region of Canada; we talked about Low Country cuisine and its many iterations depending upon the region of the U.S. it hails from. From the high-end kitchens of New York City, we saw a “sweet genius” show us his secrets to creating incredible sugar flowers for bespoke wedding cakes and also saw drone “bartenders” shaking cocktails on stage.

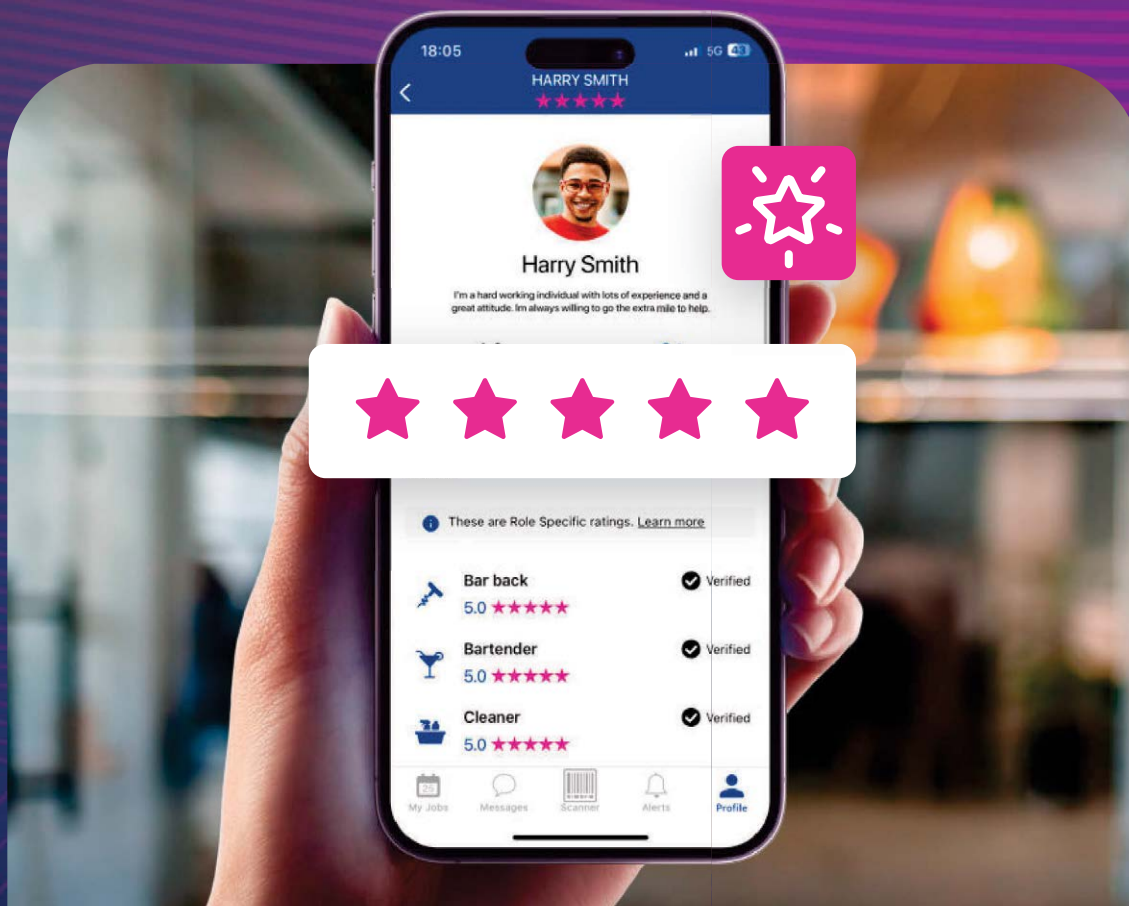
Acceleration or deceleration of trends or fads is ever-evolving, the attention span of the average consumer is ever-shrinking, and we are constantly brainstorming for the next idea to delight our clients. It is our hope at *Catersource* magazine that our content makes your event ideation and menu building a little easier.

Enjoy your spring season!

Kathleen Stoehr, Director of Community & Content Strategy



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Spring 2024 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** explores why your teambuilding events may be failing.



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** identifies the challenges that stop salespeople from hitting their revenue goals.



Leading Caterers of America Executive Director **Carl Sacks** puts the spotlight on why it's important to operate a sustainable catering business.



Total Party Planner's **Melissa Tibben** discusses the value of off-premise inspiration days.

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@cattersource.com.

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The Importance of Operating a Sustainable Catering Business

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles that will look at the relationship between sustainability and catering.

Sustainability is perhaps the most important issue of our time. Any diminishment of sustainability affects virtually the entire human population of the world, as well as the flora and fauna with which we share our world.

One common definition of sustainability is “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising

the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Another forward-looking perspective is that all earthbound resources are ultimately finite, so we need to act as stewards for the earth to make sure that we don’t leave a damaged planet for our children and grandchildren. This is the reason that conservation of resources is so important.

Considering climate change

The impacts of diminished resources as a result of climate change may vary, and as residents of the world’s wealthiest country, we are insulated to some degree. But even here in North America the costs are beginning to mount.

Climate change is real and happening in front of our eyes. As I write these words in mid-January, today’s temperature is slightly more than 30 degrees above the historic temperature for this date in the mountain area where I spend most weekends. According to today’s ski report, we are seeing spring skiing conditions in the depths of winter. In the news last week, it was announced that according to NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), 2023 was the warmest year since global records began to be kept in 1850.

Climate change represents a risk to our industry as well as the planet. There is a mix of costs and benefits as the planet warms; for instance, some

“We need to act as stewards for the earth to make sure that we don’t leave a damaged planet for our children and grandchildren. This is the reason that conservation of resources is so important.”

areas of the world that formerly were not usable for agriculture may become viable as the world warms. Also, some types of agricultural products may benefit from the changing climate. But overall, the risks substantially outweigh the rewards, as the steep increase in costs of food that has been exacerbated recently by climate change has proven. As severe droughts become more common, glaciers melt and sea levels rise, many people in both rich and poor countries may become climate refugees.

The effects of agriculture

So where does the catering industry fit into the sustainability equation?

Agriculture is a major contributor to climate change, and therefore has a substantial negative impact on sustainability. Between clearing land for farming and farming itself, agriculture generates 21% of all greenhouse gas emissions—substantially more than all transportation worldwide.

Of course, everyone needs to be fed. But not all agriculture outputs become food for humans, which is part of the problem. Even within the range of agricultural outputs going directly to feed people, some food choices have a much more negative impact than others. Decisions that we as an industry make and offer our clients and guests can help mitigate these downsides.

Another perspective on the impact of the foodservice industry is that foodservice in the United States has rebounded and even surpassed its pre-pandemic level

of revenue, hitting \$1.16 trillion in 2023. The “catering by caterers” industry represents about 1.5% of that total, and catering by all providers represents about 5%. This is a significant amount of food, generating a substantial environmental impact.

Creating a more sustainable environment

So, how can we as caterers contribute to creating a more sustainable environment?


It is self-evident that food is the primary (though not sole) product that caterers sell. And because most caterers sell food every day, and sometimes in very large quantities, we can and should help make a positive difference.

There are four major factors to be considered regarding the impact of the catering industry on sustainability.

- **Supply side input sustainability:** these include the choices we make on the food products we buy, the

supplies we consume, and the operational methods we use to convert raw food into finished food.

- **Demand side output sustainability:** these are the menus offered by us and products selected by our clients to be produced and served by our companies.
- **Corporate sustainability:** this refers to how catering companies are structured, what policies they operate under, and how the culture of the company encourages attention to sustainability.
- **Community sustainability:** this final description refers to the interactions between a caterer and its stakeholders, including vendors, clients, investors, professional services providers, landlords, and all other community members. This is also where we can address questions surrounding the use of sustainability as a promotional tool for caterers.

In the upcoming articles in this series, we will delve into these considerations in greater detail. 



Carl Sacks has spent more than 17 years as a consultant to the catering industry, starting at Catersource, and currently as the managing member of Certified Catering Consultants. His list of clients includes many of the most prominent and successful caterers in the industry.

He is regarded as the top expert in several catering related areas, including maximizing financial returns, strategic planning, and exit strategy development and implementation. He is also widely known for his expertise in contract and venue RFP response development. Carl also provides advisory services to both buyers and sellers of catering companies, and he has been involved in many successful transactions.



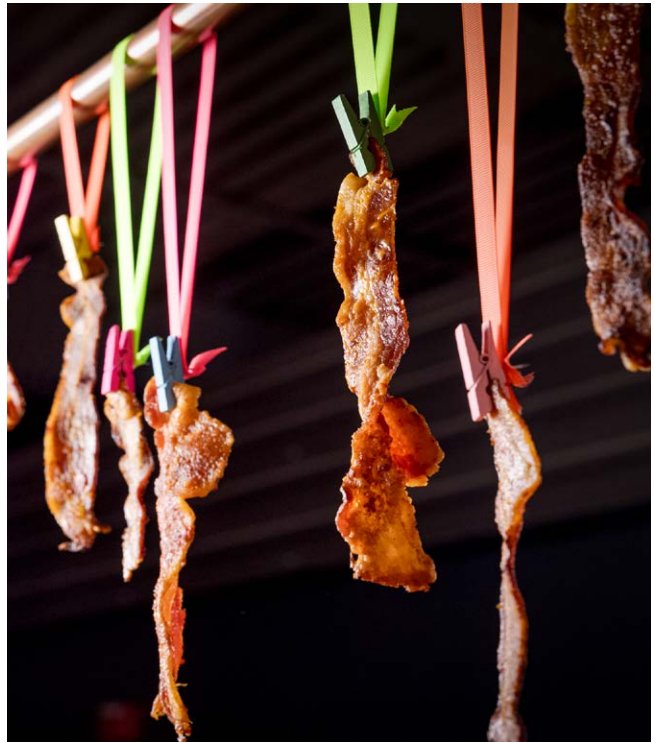
GOING HOG WILD

**Catersource + The Special Event's Opening
Night Party brought together food,
entertainment, and décor under one roof**

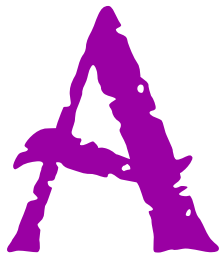
By Amber Kispert



Whimsical themed take-home cups were a huge hit during the event. Attendees flocked to servers whenever they hit the floor to grab a memento to bring home.



Vestals Catering tapped into the suspended bacon trend by hanging their thick-cut bacon up to cool.



Attendees to this year's **Catersource + The Special Event** (turn to page 44 for all of the trends seen during this year's event) found themselves smack dab in the middle of the wild west during the **Opening Night Party**, which was described as "a mysterious pop-up bar experience" in the heart of Texas.


The Opening Night Party encapsulated the theme of "Neon Spur" around every corner: neon-clad cowboys, Texas treats (provided in collaboration by a total of nine caterers) that made everyone's taste buds dance, and décor that brought it all together. Attendees

themselves were even part of the ambiance by donning their best "cowboy chic."

"When there's a theme, everyone is coming in costume now," said David Merrell (AOO Events) during his annual trends session presented during **Catersource + The Special Event**. "It creates a sense of community and inclusivity."

Not only did the Neon Spur tap into the growing popularity of theme events (turn to page 26 in *Special Events* at the back of this issue for more on theme events), but it also embraced the emerging trend of "mixed themes" (as predicted by Kristin Banta in her session *Design to Impact in 2024*) by bringing two seemingly opposite themes together in a cohesive way.

"A third of consumers prefer a theme for their events," said Banta, "so the more unique, the better."

Here's a look back at a truly rootin'-tootin' celebration. 

Continued on page 12

Opposite page:
This year's Opening Night Party was held at Brazos Hall and attendees celebrated with a Neon Spur event theme.



Pimento cheese savory shortbread wafers with cowboy candy from Austin Catering.



A freshly shucked street corn cup from Urban Cowboy Catering



Felicetti served BBQ Brisket Mac & Cheese as well as a dessert cannoli.



Warm sugar butter brushed buttermilk biscuits with gochujang-glazed thick cut bacon with whipped Boursin cheese and blueberry thyme jam from Vestals Catering



Mexican street corn served over a corn pancake with lime, tajin, and micro cilantro from Contigo Catering



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Water in aluminum cans are a great recyclable alternative to plastic bottles.



Shrimp campechana (Gulf Coast shrimp, tomatoes, cucumber, celery, and avocado) was served with a tortilla chip from Y Comida.



Everyone loves a good photo op. Attendees could pose throughout the night with a cardboard cutout of Matthew McConaughey.



(Left) A true southern classic: corn bread muffins served with honey butter. (Above) Vestals Catering incorporated neon colors into their station design as a way to bring the event's Neon Spur theme to life.



Chile spiced shrimp tostadita with guacamole and a prickly pear margarita pipette from Austin Catering



Dirty rice with chicken and sausage, peppers and onions, and hot sauce from Hank's Catering



Attendees embraced the Neon Spur event theme head-on by donning their best "cowboy chic" attire.

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It's Time to Celebrate

Congratulations to this year's CATIE Best Catered Event finalists' visionary work at Catersource + The Special Event 2024

Events have always been experiences. But gone are the days where you could simply set up a buffet or standard dual-plated entrée and spark a wowed reaction from guests. Innovation is at an all-time high in our industry, and in-person events are booming again after the craving for connection soared post-pandemic.

For those reasons, this year's Catered Arts Through Innovative Excellence (CATIE) Awards felt more

noteworthy than ever before. The level of ingenuity, detail, and sheer brilliance felt unmatched.

We're honored to share the consummate visions of this year's finalists for Best Catered Event! Finalists were honored at the 2024 Catersource + The Special Event in February during the annual [Awards Ceremony](#).



24 Carrots Catering & Events, “Oh, the Places You’ll Grow” — Finalist

When a venue client came to 24 Carrots Catering & Events to help them celebrate their springtime grand re-opening, they cultivated the ultimate vision based on an intersection of seasonality with Dr. Seuss’s *Oh the Places You’ll Go*.

The concept

Using the “*Oh, the Places You’ll Grow*” mantra inspired a seamless connection of the client’s new vision, flourishing living décor, a seasonal menu, and a design that incorporated the colors of this season of rebirth.

The menu

The team wanted the taste of hospitality to start from the moment guests entered the new facility. So, they crafted a “Here’s the Tea”

cocktail using Japanese whiskey, pandan, hōjicha milk tea, lemon, and grapefruit. It was specially crafted to complement the figurative spilling of the tea on the venue’s new vision to their guests.

Once guests were sipping on sweet tea, the bright and beautiful bites started flowing.

The menu was very focused on fresh flavors and entirely new seasonal dishes like honey mushroom tzatziki and favorites like the mini coconut lime grilled cheese with lime-pickled jalapeño.

They paired passed hors d’oeuvres with interactive, internationally inspired stations that spanned the Mediterranean, Latin America, and the Philippines. Favorite plates were harissa prawns with charred eggplant and pastrami tacos—bountiful fare overflowing with color, refreshing flavors, and creativity that delighted guests.

The design

Springtime is synonymous with bright, bold colors and lush florals. So, that’s exactly what they used to cultivate a bright, crisp, and intriguing canvas for their client.

White furniture with wood accents, greenery chandeliers, peach roses with pops of white, pink, and yellow, and rustic metals you’d find in a garden adorned the venue from floor to ceiling.

The execution

After overcoming scheduling challenges with construction delays, the ultimate goal was to make the theme, décor, and cuisine feel seamlessly integrated. Connecting every department internally to ensure that happened allowed the client to start a new chapter with nothing left to do but grow!

This year’s Catered Arts Through Innovative Excellence (CATIE) Awards felt more noteworthy than ever before. The level of ingenuity, detail, and sheer brilliance felt unmatched.

The JDK Group, “Level Up” — Finalist

As caterers, there is nothing quite like the adrenaline rush that comes with a last-minute, high-profile event right as you head into the busy season. This is exactly what The JDK Group experienced for this year’s submission.

The concept

Eight weeks pre-event, The JDK Group was asked to cater an event for one of the world’s leading technology companies. The conference was filled with global C-suite attendees who

were used to the world’s finest, most diverse cuisine.

As such, they aligned with the conference’s theme, “Level Up,” and made it their objective to leave a lasting impression on this worldly team with an extraordinary culinary affair.

The menu

They cultivated gluten-free, nut-free, and vegan courses for the majority of participants, which was a creative challenge, but one that was welcomed and met with fervor. The four-course meal included:

✱ **First course:** Fresh vegetable noodle salad with an agave sesame vinaigrette

✱ **Second course:** Ravioli melanzane with porcini and truffle ravioli, arugula pesto, caramelized aubergine, stracciatella, cured bresaola, and micro herbs

✱ **Third course:** Sea bass olla podrida with Castilian stew, fried fish skin, edamame, and spicy saffron aioli

✱ **Fourth course:** Wagyu strip steak with fondant potatoes, sous vide jumbo asparagus, onion jus, parsley oil, and celeriac chips

✱**Fifth course:** Strawberry peach bavarois with limoncello coulis, crushed pistachio, micro flowers, and candy glass garnish

The kicker? These plates were brand-new dishes created for this event to truly wow the client.

The design

They embraced a rustic aesthetic with a collection of wood, moss, café metallic linens, lanterns, and wooden chargers. With this, they tied the company's brand colors

in through minimal floral accents, napkins, etc.

The execution

Several logistical and design meetings took place in preparation for producing such a high-caliber menu and event experience.

From selecting the perfect china, flatware, and glassware, physically rehearsing the flow of synchronized service with the full-service team, and designing an aesthetic that complemented the technology

company's brand and the audience to the internal marketing team creating custom-designed menu signage and personalized menus—every department in the organization was involved to ensure this event's execution was flawless.

The executive chef then added an extra layer of guest engagement by introducing each course and fully describing the details of the culinary components they were about to encounter.

Continued on page 22





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WINNER: Culinary Crafts, “Teach a Man to Fish”

We’re pretty sure the rare few who have dined in a river with water flowing over their toes were a part of this unique adult summer camp event produced by Culinary Crafts. Yes, it’s as compelling and impressive as it sounds, which earned them the winning title for Best Catered Event 2024.

The concept

The Culinary Crafts team was approached to create a culinary retreat for a select group of VIP guests. The event would transport the guests to an epicurean summer camp for grown-ups, where they would enjoy Pol Roger and caviar in the shadow of a mountain, learn fly-tying and casting from experts, fish for trout, lounge by a flowing stream savoring cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, then get their feet wet enjoying a four-course plated dinner... in the river!

The menu

The menu was inspired by the venue—primal and natural, featuring fresh, local ingredients that were easily prepared on-site.

The guests started in a barn at the venue, nibbling on a foraged board with charcuterie and fresh herbs and flowers alongside bites like deviled eggs with shaved truffle and smoked trout. This prefaced a trout fishing activity to prepare for the experience and really stay on theme.

During the fishing experience, the charcuterie station was moved riverside into the bed of a vintage pick-up truck, along with a bar under the trees. Butler-passed pizza was also made in wood-fired ovens right before guests’ eyes.

The highlight of the day, though, was the dinner in the river. This four-course pairing dinner featured a:



✳️**Soup course:** Mushroom bisque paired with Old Town Cellars Elusive Chardonnay or Waterbrook Chardonnay

✳️**First course:** Mesquite-grilled trout with beach salsa corn purée, blistered tomatoes, chorizo, and sage paired with Old Town Cellars Perpetual Pinot Noir or Zilch Rosé Bubbles

✳️**Beef course:** Grilled Snake River Farm tomahawk ribeyes, garlic herb butter, coffee flake salt with fried Brussels sprouts, bacon, Fresno chilies, and sesame seeds paired with Old Town Cellars Outlaw Reserve Cabernet or Waterbrook Cabernet

✳️**Salad course:** Rainbow chard, melon, house-made ricotta, granola, vanilla vinaigrette



The evening ended with dessert around the fire pit with cider, a Chateau Suduiraut Sauternes, hot chocolate, or a locally roasted coffee blend. They also offered a little nightcap before the end of the evening featuring leather-aged chocolate Negronis with a local chocolate pairing.

Complex flavors with simple ingredients made for an unforgettable meal.

The design

The design was elegant but minimal to play up the natural surroundings and great outdoors of this Utah off-the-grid “venue.” They shared that, “In the spirit of Henry David Thoreau,

they went to the woods not to escape life, but to live more deeply.”


They encouraged guests to immerse themselves in nature, turn off gadgets, and indulge in the beauty of the mountains.

The execution

The team realized that serving dinner in a river sounded a bit crazy. But they also realized that with careful planning, heavyweight tables, plenty of fisherman’s wader boots, and preparing guests in the invitation, they could do it and give guests an experience they had surely never had before.

The team scouted the site in advance to find the spot with the right water depth, shade, and slope of the bank to allow easy access to the river. The venue’s owners generously worked with them in advance to groom the field and bank, clear rocks to form a safe path and test the way the tables and chairs sat in the water. They were able to set lights along the path to the river and strung lights out over the water.

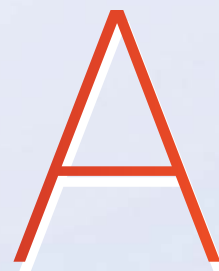
For power, they needed generators placed close enough to provide light and heat but still out of sight and earshot.

Leading up to the event, they kept a close eye on weather reports and had backup plans in case of inclement weather. But luckily, they were able to continue on with the original plan, and the prep and ingenuity paid off. The guests were blown away. 

24 Carrots Catering & Events, The JDK Group, and Culinary Crafts are all proud members of the ICA. For more information on how to join the ICA and to be notified of future catering industry webinars, events, and education opportunities, visit internationalcaterers.org.

IN THE GLASS

By Amber Kispert



Sobbering Thought

There's a lot of buzz
surrounding
buzz-free drinks

In a world that is becoming increasingly conscious of health and wellness, the sober curious movement has taken center stage, redefining social norms around alcohol consumption. This shift in mindset has not only transformed individuals' relationships with alcohol but has also paved the way for mixologists and caterers to get innovative behind the bar.

“Worldwide we are experiencing a paradigm shift in the way we approach drinking, with bigger cultural forces at work that mean the need for quality non-alcoholic options has never been more relevant,” said Ben Branson, founder of Seedlip (a non-alcoholic spirit brand) in an article for *Fortune*. “People are increasingly more mindful of their health and what they consume in terms of food and drink. These societal shifts are forcing a recalibration of our relationship with alcohol; as a result, elevated non-alcoholic options have never been more in demand.”



The Saigon Swizzle is a non-alcoholic cocktail featuring tropical flavors such as mango, pineapple, lime, and coconut. Photo courtesy Tony Pereyra

SAIGON SWIZZLE

Recipe courtesy Tony Pereyra, The Spirits in Motion

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

1 oz fresh mango nectar
 ¾ oz kaffir lime syrup
 ¾ oz pineapple juice
 ½ oz lime juice
 3 oz coconut water

METHOD

Combine all ingredients and shake vigorously with ice. Strain over fresh ice. Swizzle, garnish and serve.

A NEW

The growing popularity of the sober curious lifestyle is driven by many factors including health and wellness concerns, increased awareness, information about alcohol's impact on mental and physical well-being, and a desire for more mindful living. While not necessarily advocating complete abstinence, it emphasizes the importance of making conscious choices.

"People are getting clever and crafty," said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during his session at this year's Catersource + The Special Event. "It's not just avoiding alcohol; it's balancing your intake."

This isn't a fleeting trend. It's a shift in the way people and generations are interacting with and thinking about alcohol use. It's about questioning the role of alcohol in one's life and exploring a healthier relationship with imbibing.

"I think the sober curious movement is a response to both people's increased focus on their health and dismantling the habit of accepting every invitation to 'grab a drink' with a coworker, friend, or date," says Ben Foster (Culinary Canvas). "If your social life revolves around meeting friends out at a bar or dinner, it's easy to find yourself going out and drinking more than you normally would."

According to *Technomic*, more than a third of Gen Z and millennial consumers (who are the driving force



THIRST

behind the sober curious lifestyle) have consumed a non-alcohol “adult” beverage on-premise in the past 30 days. And we’re not talking about infused waters, sodas, iced teas, and lemonades either, but rather non-alcoholic beer, non-alcoholic wine, or alcohol-free cocktails made with high-end mixers, house-made syrups, unique ingredients, and alcohol-free spirits.

“Traditionally, if you weren’t drinking, options were limited to soda water with lime or a sugary, childish looking ‘mocktail,’” according to Branson. “But now, you can create great-tasting, sophisticated and complex cocktails, without alcohol.”

The sober curious movement is becoming so common place in today’s event landscape that there’s even events entirely dedicated to being alcohol free. One example is Pure Clarity™ Mindful Drinking, Mindful Living (the first event of its kind on the west coast), which was an all-day, immersive #DryJanuary experience that put a spotlight on alcohol-free and mindful living, showcasing non-alcoholic alternatives for daily enjoyment. The event was filled with workshops, speakers, book signings, wellness classes, activations, and products to incorporate into a non-alcoholic lifestyle.

“It’s becoming more of a socially acceptable position to say ‘no’ to alcohol now,” says Sarah Siegel (the founder of Pure Clarity™). “People are able to own this and feel empowered in their decision.”

Chowgirls Catering served several non-alcoholic cocktail options during a menu preview event, including a Grapefruit Rosemary Shrub (shown, right) and a Spiced Cherry Fizz. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



The Garden Spritz is a refreshing mix of mint, cucumber, agave, and lime. Photo courtesy Ben Foster

GARDEN SPRITZ

Recipe courtesy Ben Foster, Culinary Canvas

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

2 oz mint and cucumber tea (recipe below)
½ oz lime juice
¾ oz agave
1 oz club soda
1 ea. cucumber
1 ea. mint sprig for garnish
1 ea. cocktail skewer

METHOD

Add the mint and cucumber tea, lime juice, and agave into a shaker with ice and shake until chilled. Strain into Tom Collins glass over fresh ice and top with club soda. Garnish with cucumber ribbon and a mint sprig.

INGREDIENTS FOR MINT & CUCUMBER TEA

10 g mint
30 g cucumber
12 oz water

METHOD

Seal 10 grams of mint, 30 grams of cucumber, and 12 oz of water in a vacuum bag. Sous vide at 120°F for one hour. Strain and chill before use.

*Alternatively, you can buy premade mint and cucumber tea.



Divine Elegance Catering & Events served the Sunshine & Longhorn in a boot-shaped glass during Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos

SUNSHINE & LONGHORNS

Recipe courtesy Divine Elegance Catering & Events

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

2 oz habanero lime syrup
2 oz passion fruit daiquiri & margarita mix
2 oz Sprite
2 oz lemonade
2 oz pineapple sparkling water
Orange slice and cherry for garnish

METHOD

1. Fill a glass with ice
2. Add habanero lime syrup, passion fruit mix, Sprite, and lemonade, then fill with sparkling water

SHAKI SOCIAL

Inclusion is another major consideration that significantly intersects with the alcohol-free movement. Simply put, you should make sure that every attendee feels welcome at your events. There are entire populations who can't drink or choose not to drink: anyone under 21, pregnant or nursing women, people taking certain medications, practitioners of some religions, and individuals living with illness, to name just a few. And we can't forget those clients who simply don't have the budget for alcohol.

"Not everyone who books or attends events drinks alcohol and you don't have the privilege of knowing their relationship to drinking, so providing good-tasting NA options is necessary," says Foster. "When intentionally courting large groups of people it's important to make the effort so no one feels like an afterthought. Just because someone is choosing not to drink does not make them unsociable. Oftentimes it's more about just having a glass in someone's hand, not what's in it. Having good NA options takes away the 'otherness' of people who don't or can't drink."

Caterers have always had a strong reputation for addressing dietary restrictions in their menus: vegan,



During an all-day, immersive #DryJanuary event attendees could experience the alcohol-free lifestyle through workshops, speakers, wellness classes, activations, and tastings. Photo courtesy Pure Clarity™ Mindful Drinking, Mindful Living

NG UP NORMS

vegetarian, nut-free, dairy-free, gluten-free, etc.—and this same approach to inclusivity should also translate to the bar.

“The same way you don’t want your vegan guests to feel like they’re just getting a plate of starch or vegetables,” said Stavros, “the same should be for NA drinkers—they want to be a part of the event too.”

By establishing an inclusive environment that normalizes alcohol-free choices, caterers can make major steps in creating a more considerate and welcoming atmosphere for all attendees.

“Embracing inclusivity is key to hosting successful events, and flavorful, artisanal non-alcoholic cocktails contribute to a more mindful social atmosphere,” says Heidi Andermack (Chowgirls Catering). “Whether individuals are embracing a sober curious lifestyle or simply opting out of alcohol, they deserve to feel included.”

The bottom line is that if these drinks feel like an afterthought on the menu, so will those guests.

“Even if you do not drink, one should be able to enjoy a drink in a sophisticated way,” says Siegel. “Offering NA options in a traditional setting to a non-drinker communicates full hospitality.”



Elements of a Good Non-Alcoholic Cocktail

1

Use the classics as a foundation: Start with your favorite classic cocktail and explore twists on the flavor to elevate it without the alcohol. For example, you can make a non-alcoholic gin and tonic with fresh herbs to keep the botanical flavor that gin often provides.

2

Balance is key: A good non-alcoholic cocktail should be well-balanced in terms of sweetness, acidity, and bitterness. Avoid making a non-alcoholic cocktail that is too sweet or too sour. Instead, aim for a balance of flavors that complement each other.

3

Presentation matters: People want to feel like they're treating themselves. Part of it is the ritual of watching it happen, being served something in a pretty glass with a nice garnish.

4

Experiment with flavors: You can use cocktail shrubs, herbal sugars like rosemary turbinado, or reductions (strawberry balsamic is a winner) to add flavor and sweetness.

5

Bubbles are an excellent start: Flavored seltzers, tonic water, or club soda make a good foundation. They add flavor and sweetness to your non-alcoholic cocktail.

Information above courtesy Divine Elegance Catering & Events

How to Upsell Non-Alcoholic Cocktails

Price it right

Start by pricing your non-alcoholic cocktails at a reasonable price point, such as \$8–\$10, to attract customers. You can also run half-price happy hours to introduce people to your NA list and build traffic, transitioning to higher prices once the happy hour period ends.

Create non-alcoholic cocktail specials

Consider creating non-alcoholic cocktail specials that are unique and different from your regular menu. This can help to entice customers to try something new and increase sales.

Offer non-alcoholic cocktail flights

Offering NA cocktail flights is a great way to allow customers to try multiple beverages at once. This can help to increase sales and encourage customers to try new mocktails.

Promote non-alcoholic cocktails on social media

Promoting your non-alcoholic cocktails on social media can help to increase awareness and drive sales. Consider posting pictures of your non-alcoholic cocktails on Instagram or Facebook and using relevant hashtags (example: #DryJanuary) to reach a wider audience.

Train your staff

Make sure your staff is knowledgeable about your non-alcoholic cocktail menu and can make recommendations to customers. This can help to increase sales and provide a better customer experience.

Information above courtesy Divine Elegance Catering & Events

MINDFUL

Living a sober lifestyle doesn't mean that clients don't want the same complexity of a craft beverage. In fact, traditionally you can expect to find two types of NA drinkers at events: those who have drank in the past and are looking to cut back and those who have never partaken.

The first type is the one leading to so much creativity behind the bar, because their past experiences lead to expectations for the same complexity, presentation, and flavor.

"A balanced and sophisticated flavor profile is key, as well as presentation," said Laura Luley (Crowne Plaza Global) in an [article for Restaurant Hospitality](#). "You can get a soda anywhere; a vending machine can dispense a soda. A thoughtfully crafted non-alcoholic cocktail is an art."

Additionally, the moniker "mocktail" is decidedly disliked by many bartenders, who contend it diminishes the libation on all levels.

Menus that showcase the care and skill involved in crafting the drink convey the same appreciation to the abstaining guest as to those who opt for alcohol.

Thoughtful tastes

First, invest the time to develop quality recipes. Simplicity is key here, so keep things approachable, colorful, and simple. Adding common or classic spins to cocktails that people recognize, or using common ingredients, can make the guests feel more comfortable.

"The most common issue with NA drinks is how they can taste watery or like a juice box. If you're offering an elevated experience, the NA drinks should be included in that concept," says Foster.

Craft non-alcoholic versions of the cocktails that you're already offering (such as espresso martinis or classics like Old Fashioneds, mojitos, and Negronis).

"This will help put your team in the correct mindset for both a flavor goal and to treat the NA options as equals to the cocktails," says Foster.

Consider limiting the options to one to three NA options depending on the size of the event, and cross-utilize ingredients from the culinary team and the traditional cocktail menu to help balance out product and costs. A bonus is that many of these non-alcoholic options can be batched for service (much like traditional cocktails) thus resulting in ease of service.

MIXOLOGY

It's also important to get your staff's buy-in with these non-alcoholic cocktails.

"Make sure that your staff is educated on the inspiration behind the drink and the ingredients, so they know how to talk about it," says Tony Pereyra (The Spirits in Motion).

Elevated experiences

Beyond the menu itself, it's also important to remember to treat non-alcoholic cocktails the same as you would any other cocktail: serve them in beautiful glasses, garnish them creatively, and ensure that your non-alcoholic guests enjoy the same experience.

"Before your guests even taste their first sip, they're drawn in by the appearance of their drink," says Amy Brown (Chowgirls Catering). "Many non-alcoholic options for sober individuals often come in plain cans or pre-batched with uninspired presentations in simple glasses. But why should non-alcoholic drinks be any less creative? We believe they deserve the same attention to detail and creativity as any other beverage! From using edible flowers and fresh herbs to serving drinks in extravagant glasses with creative ice and garnishes, every element contributes to the overall experience of a fantastic bar service."

Engage attendees with interactive tasting stations featuring alcohol-free alternatives. From artisanal alcohol-free beers to alcohol-free spirits, these stations provide an opportunity for guests to explore new and exciting flavors while adhering to their sober curious lifestyle. Or elevate the culinary experience by pairing gourmet dishes with complementary non-alcoholic beverages. This not only adds sophistication to the event but also allows attendees to savor the flavors without relying on alcohol for enhancement.

As the sober curious movement gains momentum, caterers have a unique opportunity to lead the way in creating inclusive and unforgettable experiences. If you haven't started embracing this yet on your menus, the time is now.

"While it's not yet a universal expectation for caterers to provide extensive NA beverages, we find that guests are pleasantly surprised and excited when they discover the range of options available," says Lindsay Erstad (Chowgirls Catering).

Cheers! 



Divine Elegance Catering & Events sampled the Dragon Fruit Rita during Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos

DRAGON FRUIT RITA

Recipe courtesy Divine Elegance Catering & Events

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

- 2½ oz margarita mix**
- 2½ oz raspberry cranberry sparkling water**
- 2½ oz dragon fruit syrup**
- Garnish with fresh mint**

METHOD

1. Fill a highball glass with ice
2. Add margarita mix, raspberry cranberry sparkling water
3. Add dragon fruit syrup

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EVENTS**



SUMMER CITRUS COOLER

Recipe courtesy Tony Pereyra, The Spirits in Motion

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

1½ oz non-alcoholic gin
 1 oz non-alcoholic aperitif
 ¾ oz fresh lemon juice
 ¾ oz Amarena cherry-basil syrup
 Dash of aqua faba
 Splash of soda

METHOD

Combine all ingredients and shake with ice.
 Strain over fresh ice and garnish.

The Summer Citrus Cooler illustrates how alcohol-free spirits (in this case gin and an aperitif) can mimic their alcoholic counterparts. Photo courtesy Tony Pereyra



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Susie Perelman (Mosaic) and David Merrell (A00 Events) present on many of this year's hottest, newest, and upcoming trends during their annual session.



Terrica (Cocktails & Details®/Terrica Inc) had a stellar line of sessions at this year's conference: *The Art of Wedding Coordination*; *How to Design for the Senses*; and *Short Story and Tall Tales: How Story Selling Gets You Booked*.

Speaker Salute!

We at Catersource + The Special Event 2024, as well as Art of Catering Food, want to offer a big thank you to our outstanding speakers and DICED competitors.

Without the support of our generous speakers and their time, talent, and wise words, we could not offer our attendees the unforgettable educational experience that we do. **We salute them here:**

Aaron Price

Adrienne Harris

Adrienna McDermott

AJ Williams

Alan Berg, CSP

Alicia Falango

Alicia Miller

Alicia Smith

Allie Piazza

Alyson Zildjian

Amanda Mora

Anca Trifan, CMP,
DES

Andre Howell

Andre Johnson

Andrew Krause

Anthony Bollotta

Anthony Lambatos

Armando Seledon,
CSEP, CTA

Art Menchaca

Ashley Scobey

Bobbi Brinkman

Bobby Bradley

Bobby Dutton

Boris Seymore

Borja Rosales

Brad Snyder

Brian Green

Bryan Butler

Bryan Neuschaefer

Bryce Cherven

Carl Sacks

Carlos Madrigal

Cathy O'Connell

Cazoshay Marie

Charessa Sawyer



Chef Boris Seymore (BDS Catering and Productions) discusses how to *Elevate & Sophisticate the Simple Classics* during *Art of Catering Food*.



Two powerhouses joined forces this year, Michael Cerbelli (Cerbelli Creative) and Jeffrey Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events), during *Feasts & Fetes: A Savvy Guide to Mastering Corporate Event Planning & Catering Collaborations*.

Charles Haracz

Chip Dizard

Chris Heffernan

Chris Sanchez

Chris Villard

Christie Osborne

Christopher Taylor

Cindy Lo

Claudia Köhler-Dams

Clint Elkins

Clint Upchurch

Colbért Callen

Colja Dams

Colton Staver

Conner Black

Cristian Hernandez

Dana Buchanan

Dana Kadwell

Dana Moberly

Daniel Altman

Daniel Epting

Daniel Joseph

Dave Stratton

David Adler

David Anderson

David Egan

David Merrell

David Porto

Dean Mistretta, MBA, CHE

Deborah Elias

Dianna Chamberlin

Dona Liston

Dorene Collier

Duce Raymond

Dustin Ward

Elizabeth Meyer

Emily Malaya

Enjolik Bailey

Eric Centeno

Erica Edie

Fausto Pifferrer

Gary Bordman, CSEP

Greg Shapiro

Heather Niemeyer

Heidi Brumbach, CMP

Hugh Groman

Hunter Hunt

Ian Ramirez

India Rhodes, CSEP

Jaclyn Watson

Jamie Lee Quickert

Jason Sutton

Jay Varga

JC York

Speaker Salute!



Chef Keith Sarasin (Aatma and The Farmer's Dinner) delivers his culinary session outlining the ins and outs of fire cooking.



Tiffany Rose Goodyear (Scentex) co-presents with Terrica during *How to Design for the Senses*.



The team from Blue Plate Catering (Dan Joseph, Trish Vogel, and Charles Haracz) talk all things tastings during their session.

Jean Claude Etienne

Jeff Ware

Jeffrey Schlissel

Jeffrey Selden

Jen Bertolino

Jen Sulak

Jeniffer Bello

Jennifer Best

Jennifer Perna

Jennifer Trotter

Jenny Bast

Jeremy Brown

Jeremy Langemann

Jeriesha Carter
Johnson

Jim Hooker

Joanne Purnell

Joel Olandesca

John Serock

Jonathan Jennings

Jonathan Jow

Joseph Pina

Joshua House

Julia Kendrick
Conway

Kaitlyn Dineen

Karen O'Connor

Katie Mast

Keith Lord

Keith Sarasin

Kelly Smink

Keri Miller

Kermit Pemberton

Kevin Dennis

Kevin Lacassin

Keyon Hammond

Kimberly Mcknight

Kristin Banta

Kylee Lawhead

Larry Frank

Laura Cardo

Laura Fabian

Laura Schwartz

Lauren Chumbley

Lazendra Danforth

Leah Weinberg

Lee Branscome

Lenny Talarico

Lindsey
Leichthammer



Duce Raymond (SBR Events) discusses how to elevate barbecue and take it to the next level during his session.



Chefs Karen O'Connor (Daniel et Daniel Catering & Events) and Joanne Purnell (Good Gracious! Events) prepare a carrot nigiri appetizer during their session, *Hors d'Oeuvres?? Don't Mind If I Do!!*.

Lisa Simon

Lisa Ware

Liza Roeser

Lucas Mendieta

Margaret Brower

Mark Ellis

Mark Lopez

Mark Williams

Mary Crafts

Mary Delia Allen

Matt Franks

Matt Logan

Meagan Culkin

Megan Estrada

Megan Turbeville

Meggie Hess

Meghan Ely

Melissa Tibben

Melissa Van Dyke

**Meredith
Commender, CSEP**

Meredith Vaux

Meryl Snow

Michael Cerbelli

**Michele Casadei
Massari**

Michele Yanovich

Miro Diamanté

**Morgan Connacher,
CSEP**

**Natalie Lowe, CMM,
CRL**

Nettie Frank

Nick Klug

**Norma Charette
White**

Patrick Peel, CHE

Paul Buchanan

Peter McCaffrey

Phoebe Hernick

Phuoc Vo

Rajan Mistry

**Randi Steinhart,
CSEP**

Reid Hubick

Renée Sabo

Renee Schuler

Reuben Bell

**Rich Rosendale,
Master Chef**

Rich Shank

Rob Barber

Robert "BJ" Beisler

Robert Mendoza

Robin Hoh

Speaker Salute!



From left: Speakers Chef Joanne Purnell (Good Gracious! Events), Chef Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events), and Chef Nettie Frank (winner of the 2024 DICED competition).



Laura Schwartz delivers this year's Opening General Session where she talked about networking and our "third places."

Robin Selden

Ron Ben-Israel

Roy Porter

Ryan Corvaia

Ryan Crafts

Ryan Whitten

Sally Webb

Scott Frankel

Sean Dent

Sebastien Centner

Sébastien David

Shannon Tarrant

Shaunelle Murphy

Sierra Reed

**Stacey Hoyt, CMP,
CSEP**

Stavros

Steve Clayton

Steve DeAngelo

Steve Sanchez

Susie Perelman

Suzanne Morrell

Suzi McMerty Shands

Syd Sexton

Sylvain Grégoire

Tabitha Mason

Tara Maxey

Tara Melvin

Tavel Bristol-Joseph

Teri Jakob

Terrica

**Tiffany Rose
Goodyear**

**Tim Altbaum, CMP,
CMM**

Tim Mitchell

Todd Annis

**Tracey Fricke, CSEP,
MWP, CMP**

Trish Vogel

Troy Peters, CTS

Vanessa Joy

Vanessa Vass

Vijay Goel

Warren Dietel

Yaron Lipshitz

Zohe Felici



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Are Your Teambuilding Events Working?

I recently did a presentation on teambuilding events and asked the audience whether they loathed or loved teambuilding events. The result? Of those who participated, there was a split of about 50-50 on either side.

Companies across the world spend billions of dollars each year on teambuilding events, attempting to bring their people closer together. The problem is that these efforts are often met with eye rolls and resistance from several employees who immediately think of trust falls and cheesy ice breakers when they hear “teambuilding.” On the other hand, consider the US Army, an organization that places significant emphasis on the importance of teambuilding. In an environment that can literally be life and death, they have found that creating closer

connections not only improves the ability for teams to meet their goals and accomplish the “impossible,” but it is also paramount in helping to build bonds that can mitigate post-traumatic stress and prevent suicide.

If we want to do the work of building trust and bringing our team members closer together, we need to understand why many teambuilding events fail.

1. They're often forced

Assuming everyone wants to go out and play paintball for free with the resident pro in the office because he has a membership might fall flat because it doesn't appeal to many people on the team. Instead, plan something that has a wider appeal to start, and don't make it mandatory. Making events optional gives you the buy-in of the people who want to be there and eliminates the people who don't want to participate. That

is, those individuals who would otherwise be working against your efforts if forced to join in. Comments like “Why are they making us do this?” and “This is so dumb” will detract from your goals, create a bigger divide among your team, and ultimately ruin the effort for everyone. Start with the people that are “all in” and build momentum in a positive way, then you can address the resisters later. At some point if they are not on board with the direction you want your team to go, it may be time for what we like to call “CDE” (Career Development Elsewhere).

2. Lack of intention

The second reason teambuilding events fail is because there is no intention behind them. They are done out of obligation and haphazardly thrown together in the form of a company picnic or holiday party. As

“NO MATTER HOW SMALL, SHARED EXPERIENCES CREATE MOMENTS OF BELONGING AS WELL AS OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE OUR RELATIONSHIPS TO EVEN GREATER LEVELS OF TRUST AND INTIMACY.”

caterers, I'm sure many of you have been hired to do these types of events for other companies and you watch as a fraction of the expected guests show up and those that do are eager to leave shortly after arriving.

If you want to do teambuilding right, think about who needs to be there, the purpose behind it, and your ideal outcome. Then you can work backward to make it unique by putting thought and intention into figuring out the right activity, the best format, and how to get people excited about it. This doesn't necessarily require spending a lot of money. Think about how to get creative with the resources you have. There are many companies that put on a "Catering Olympics" event at their facility with competitions for tray carrying, table setting, chair stacking, and food plating. These challenges create friendly competition, reinforce training, and allow team members to show their creativity utilizing many of the products and equipment you already have on hand.


3. Misunderstanding team camaraderie

Finally, teambuilding events fail because organizers don't understand the current state of team camaraderie. No one wants to look silly, especially around people they don't know very well. You must take time to understand where your team stands and plan an appropriate activity. If your team is fairly new

or has been struggling to work together, they probably aren't going to be too keen on sharing deeply personal information. Start slow with approachable teambuilding activities like volunteering at a local food bank or taking a field trip to a purveyor. These offer great opportunities for team members to share an experience and get to know one another in a more organic way. Then once certain levels of safety and comfort have been established you can work your way up to more in-depth activities that help build deeper and stronger connections among the team.

Remember, not all teambuilding needs to be in the form of an event or a company outing. You can take advantage of hidden opportunities throughout the day. A five-minute kickoff question to start a meeting, a quick stretch break during the day, or providing space for team members to eat lunch together can all make a big difference if done consistently

over time. Sharing personal and professional wins each week during a meeting or highlighting personal accomplishments on an internal social media account helps team members get to know one another better. And an impromptu taste test competition or trivia game can infuse fun and build camaraderie during work hours.

No matter how small, shared experiences create moments of belonging as well as offering opportunities to take our relationships to even greater levels of trust and intimacy. As leaders, we have a responsibility to help foster these connections within our teams and much of that work can be done through teambuilding activities. To ensure your teambuilding efforts have maximum impact, make sure to involve your team in the planning, be intentional about what you want to accomplish, make them unique, and do the work to understand the current state of relationships on your team. 



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).


What Stops Salespeople from Hitting their Revenue Goals?

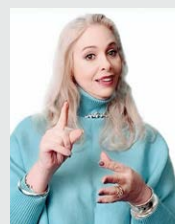
Sales teams are the lifeblood of many businesses tasked with driving revenue and growth. However, numerous challenges can impede their ability to meet their revenue goals. From ineffective sales techniques to inadequate support and market fluctuations, salespeople face myriad obstacles in their pursuit of success.

Several factors can hinder salespeople from reaching their revenue goals:

- 1. Ineffective sales techniques:** Salespeople may struggle if they haven't mastered effective sales techniques or are not adapting their approach to different customers and situations.
- 2. Poor product knowledge:** Salespeople must fully understand the products or services they're selling to communicate their value to customers.
- 3. Lack of training:** Salespeople may need proper training and development to have the skills or knowledge needed to excel in their roles.
- 4. Deficient support:** Sales teams may need more support from their managers or other departments, such as marketing or customer service, making it challenging to meet their goals.
- 5. Market conditions:** External factors such as economic downturns, changes in consumer behavior, or increased competition can impact sales performance.
- 6. Poor time management:** Salespeople may struggle to prioritize their tasks effectively, leading to wasted time and missed opportunities.
- 7. Lack of motivation:** Sales is a demanding profession, and if salespeople aren't motivated or passionate about what they're selling, they may struggle to stay focused and driven.

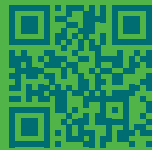
- 8. Inefficient sales processes:** If the sales process is overly complex or inefficient, it can slow the sales cycle and prevent salespeople from closing deals quickly.
- 9. Fear of rejection:** Rejection is a standard part of sales, but some salespeople may struggle to handle it, leading to hesitation or avoidance in prospecting and closing deals.
- 10. Understand they are a salesperson, not an order taker:** Order takers fulfill requests, whereas sales professionals actively engage with customers, identify their needs, and provide tailored solutions. Understanding this distinction is fundamental for salespeople aiming to surpass revenue goals.
- 11. Inadequate director of sales:** When the director of sales lacks leadership, vision, or strategic direction, it can lead to confusion, poor decision-making, and ineffective management of the sales team, ultimately hindering their ability to achieve revenue goals.

By addressing these challenges head-on through targeted training, robust support systems, and a commitment to continuous improvement, businesses can empower their sales teams to overcome obstacles and achieve their revenue targets. Organizations can position themselves for sustained success in the competitive marketplace through strategic investment in resources and a focus on cultivating a motivated and skilled sales force. 



With 30 years of experience owning event planning, high-end catering, and design and décor companies, Meryl Snow is on a mission to help businesses get on their own path to success. As a Senior Consultant for [Certified Catering Consultants](#) and a Senior Consultant & Sales Trainer for [SnowStorm Solutions](#), Meryl travels throughout North America training clients in the areas of sales, marketing, design, and branding. As a valued industry speaker, she speaks with groups from the heart with warmth and knowledge and covers the funny side of life and business.

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TEXAS

TAKES THE TOP

*Catersource +
Event along
Catering Food show
of the top trends*

By Amber

*All photos courtesy Ivan Piedra
Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhoto*

IT WAS A TEXAS-SIZED AFFAIR with a focus on live entertainment, along with [Art of Catering Food](#) rolling in to show-stopping techniques, there was a lot to see. The event may be over, but inspiring ideas during the week will live on. Let's look at the trends and how you can incorporate them into your business.



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otos, unless otherwise noted*

When **Catersource + The Special Event**
led into town. From trending flavors
was inspiration around every corner.
catering and food trends seen
at some of this year's hottest trends
to your business.





EDIBLE EXTRAS

Top left: Abstract Ice served branded ice cubes during Susie Perelman's (Mosaic) session.

Top right: Michael Cerbelli's: The Hot List™ showcased Sugar Lab Pro's custom cocktail garnishes that can be branded or themed to any type of event thanks to their 3D printing technology.



CRAVING CAVIAR

Bottom left: A perfect hors d'oeuvre that incorporates caviar (or trout roe in this case) is a blini: a miniature pancake accented with crème fraîche and chives during Art of Catering Food. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



COMFORT FOOD

Bottom right: A lot of folks remember growing up on Frito Pie (particularly in the '50s, '60s, and '70s), which was served during the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



EDIBLE EXTRAS

Companies are constantly trying to find new and creative ways to solidify their brand in the minds of their clients. A growing trend among caterers when working with corporate clients is the use of edible branding, such as food stamps, custom logoed pancakes, cocktail messages, edible ink, custom sugar garnishes, and branded ice.

These edible extras are a way to personalize an event while also serving as a conversation starter for attendees.

“It’s a whole experience from a sensory standpoint,” said Kristin Banta (Kristin Banta Events) during her annual trend session at Catersource + The Special Event.

CRAVING CAVIAR

2024 will be the year of caviar. Caviar has been growing on menus over the past couple years, but it has really hit its stride over the past year thanks to the popularity of the caviar bump.

The caviar bump is simply this: a dollop of caviar is placed on an event attendee’s hand and then is licked off.

“You need to not be afraid of caviar and think that it’s solely a luxury product,” said Sean Dent (Local LA Catering by David Lefevre) during his session on caviar as part of Art of Catering Food. “The caviar bump takes away the edge of caviar’s luxury—it’s interactive, it’s fun, it’s for everyone.”

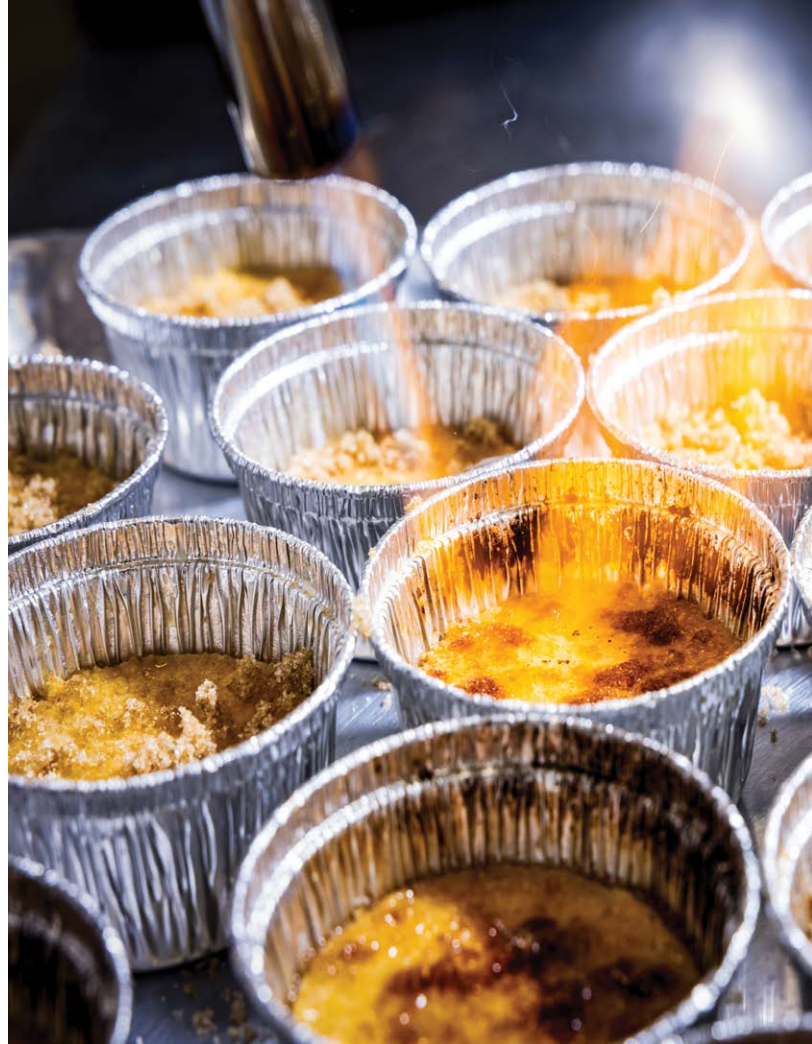
Don’t be mistaken, though; caviar can in fact mean luxury, which is why it’s also a great upsell opportunity in myriad ways. Garnish your hors d’oeuvres with a dollop (turn to page 77 for a brunch recipe that uses caviar), serve them alongside a champagne or vodka flight, or even set up an entire caviar buffet atop a beautiful ice bar.

“Make no mistake, luxury is a thing,” said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during his annual

COMFORT FOOD

Top right: Chef Boris Seymore’s Sweet Potato Flan Brûlée (egg yolks, brown sugar, vanilla extract, heavy cream, and sweet potato pie batter) served during AOCF. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Bottom: During the Art of Catering Food Lunch & Learn, *A Trip South*, chefs dialed into their family recipes with such dishes as Chef Boris Seymore’s Georgia Mae’s Blueberry Chicken (chicken thighs, blueberry sweet tea, star anise, blueberry simple syrup, bay leaves, thyme, orange, lemon, black peppercorns, garlic, and crushed red pepper flakes). Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.





trend session as part of Catersource + The Special Event. “It’s going to be the year of caviar...from the least expensive roe all the way up to the most expensive beluga.”

A COMFORTING THOUGHT

Modernized comfort food is more than meatloaf and macaroni and cheese. Comfort food evokes nostalgia and feels like a warm embrace on a cold winter's night.

Diners are seeking familiarity with dishes that “taste like home,” but they also want new, tasty combinations. This can be done by adding or swapping ingredients in traditional dishes, or applying techniques like slow cooking, braising, and creating family-style meals that allow people to enjoy them around the table together. Comfort is all about creating those amazing first-bite moments that show guests the meal was made with love.

Just because you’re leaning into comforting flavors and nostalgic dishes doesn’t mean there isn’t an opportunity to elevate, however. Reinvent something like a chicken pot pie as a canape in a puff pastry or serve a deconstructed slider on a skewer, or perhaps butler-pass some shrimp and grits in martini glasses.

“It’s about being creative,” said Chef Boris Seymore (BDS Catering and Productions) during his Art of Catering Food session, *Elevate & Sophisticate the Simple Classics*. “This is one of the most strategic and important measures that you need.”

When harnessing the comfort food trend, also remember that the 1990s (and all its comfort food glory) is back in a big way, with throwbacks like individual charcuterie boards served Lunchables®-style (a true ‘90s classic), gourmet toaster strudels or Pop-Tarts®, and elevated pizza rolls.



COMFORT FOOD

Top left: Contigo Catering served a Toasted Marshmallow Rocky Road Bar during the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Bottom left: She Crab Soup is a classic southern dish (white onion, celery stalks, butter, flour, Old Bay seasoning, blackening seasoning, bay leaf, thyme, whole milk, heavy cream, Worcestershire sauce, hot sauce, sherry, chives, crab meat, and crab roe), but everyone makes it a little differently, and everyone thinks that theirs is the best. Shown: Cru Catering’s sample served during Art of Catering Food. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

I WANT CANDY

Candy bars continue to trend at events. Who doesn't love the opportunity to load up on some sugary treats? But caterers are getting even more creative with candy bars these days.

First up, freeze dried candies are popping up all over the place, adding a bit of uniqueness to any candy setup.

Next, themed candy bars are proving to be popular among event goers. Think buffets made up of candies from a particular decade (i.e., Laffy Taffy®, Ring Pops®, and Pop Rocks® from the 1970s, Big League Chew™, Nerds®, and Warheads® from the 1980s, and Airheads®, Baby Bottle Pops®, and SweeTARTS® from the 1990s).

While commercial and nostalgic candies are obviously crowd-pleasers, don't ignore the upsell opportunity when making your own candy buffets. Think chocolate dipped pretzels, homemade fudge, and colorful lollipops. You can even get your guests in on the fun by setting up an interactive chocolate building "Bean to Bar" station, where guests can select flavors of chocolate and add-ins such as nuts, fruits, and candies to go into a personalized chocolate bar which they get to take home. Up the ante even more by creating custom candy wrappers featuring your attendees' photos.

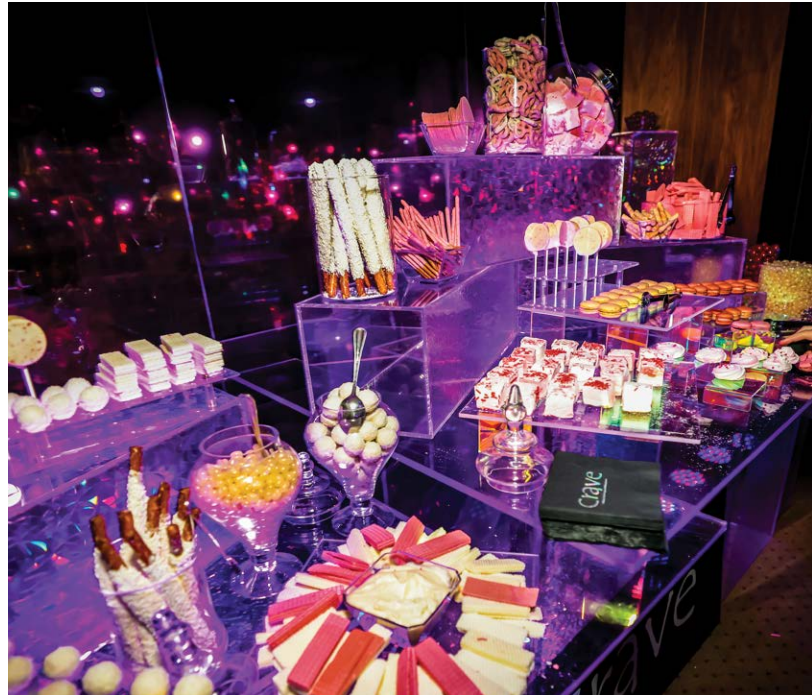
PUTTING THE PLANTS BACK IN PLANT-BASED

Veggie-centric dining continues to be a dominant force in the food industry. According to a 2023 survey from Elohi Strategic Advisors, 69% of consumers of plant-based meat expect to eat more plant-based alternatives this year, with an additional 29% of these consumers expecting to eat the same amount.

I WANT CANDY

Top right and bottom: Freeze-dried candies have become increasingly popular due to their unique texture, intense flavor, and longer shelf life. Chef Nettie Frank showcased how these little treats can beautifully dress up any candy buffet during her Art of Catering Food session. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Middle: Crave Catering had an impressive candy display during the Closing Night Celebration which featured such treats as meringues, homemade marshmallows, tuiles, chocolate pipettes, and candied fruits.





PLANT-BASED

Clockwise from top left: Vegan tartare (garlic, capers, Dijon, vegan mayo, shallots, and smoked beets) served atop vegan bone marrow (hearts of palm, zucchini, garlic, thyme, spinach, tomatoes, vegan cheese, and yellow onion) was served during Jeffrey Schlissel's (The Bacon Cartel) session, *Where There is Smoke, There is Yumminess*. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Smoked carrot lox, crème fraîche, caviar, and dill from VEGG Catering were served during the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Korean jackfruit tostada with purple cabbage, sriracha, and sesame from VEGG Catering served during the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Vegan dill cream cheese and sundried tomato cucumber from Hank's Catering was served as part of the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



"It's time to embrace it if you haven't," Stavros said. "You can now produce an entirely plant-based meal, even if it's not an entirely plant-based guest list."

Consumers and producers alike are looking to rely more heavily on traditional plant proteins (such as mushrooms, walnuts, tempeh, and legumes) in place of complex meat alternatives.

Think mushroom birria tacos, black bean burgers, vegan charcuterie boards, beet tartare, carrot nigiri, and vegan bone marrow made from hearts of palm. These creative [plant-based options](#) are even satisfying those guests who may not necessarily be vegan or vegetarian.

"I'm not plant-based, but I love to dabble in plant-based," said Jeffrey Schlissel of The Bacon Cartel. "It's about craveability."

"We're redefining delicious and inclusive catering," adds Eric Centeno (Exquisite Delites Catering Company), who presented *Avantgarden! Vegan & Vegetarian Cuisine* during Catersource + The Special Event. "If you're excited as a chef about what you're creating, it's contagious."

SMOKING HOT SERVICE

Today's attendees are looking for something a little extra at their events.

"Everyone wants an experience because dining is experiential now," said Stavros. "The key word is fun. The key word is engaging."

"The biggest struggle is that what we're trying to do now is build these stations that will have guests immersed," said Phuoc Vo (CBK Catering & Events) during his session on liquid nitrogen.

This is where such practices as smoked dishes under glass, the cocktail Flavour Blaster gun, [live fire cooking](#), liquid nitrogen, torched desserts, smoked bourbon stations, and interactive stations come into play.

SMOKIN HOT SERVICE

Top right: The Gastro Garage is an immersive, experiential dining and catering concept specializing in savory brioche donuts filled with nitrous foam, torched toppings, and finishing oils that are cooked by blow torches.

Bottom: Chef Phuoc Vo (CBK Catering & Events) brought the heat (or in this case, the chill!) during his session on liquid nitrogen as part of Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.





"It's one thing to present a dish, it's another to present an experience," said Keith Sarasin (Aatma and the Farmer's Dinner) during his live fire cooking session at Catersource + The Special Event.

Think torching crème brûlée live at the table, flame grilling a hanging tomahawk steak, and treats (popcorn, ice cream, and cereals) made with liquid nitrogen.

These sensory experiences, which tap into everything from sight to smell to sound, instantly wow guests and immerse them in the event.

"You can create spectacle with food and beverage," said David Merrell (AOO Events) during his annual trend session. "It creates an experience and you want to taste it."

SUSTAINABILITY SUCCESS

Sustainability is no longer a buzzword; it's a crucial aspect of businesses today.

As environmental consciousness grows, sustainability has become a focal point for the catering industry (turn to page 08 for a deeper dive on sustainability in the catering space). Consumers are increasingly demanding eco-friendly options, pushing caterers to adopt sustainable sourcing practices, [reduce food waste](#), and embrace eco-conscious packaging while ensuring a smaller carbon footprint.

"We need to create an ecosystem where we're working with sustainability every day," said Art of Catering Food keynote (and James Beard nominated) Chef Tavel Bristol-Joseph. "By being able to be proactive, we can create systems in which you can utilize the whole of something. Sustainability is limitless."

One of the major topics of conversation surrounding sustainability (when related to catering) is [reducing food waste](#). With nearly one-third of all food produced being wasted, the food and beverage industry is looking for every opportunity to cut back on leftovers.

One way to reduce food waste in the kitchen is to repurpose ingredients using [fermentation](#) (see

SUSTAINABILITY SUCCESS

Top left: The Opening Night Party traded in the typical plastic water bottles for sustainable aluminum cans. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Bottom left: Chef Jenny Bast (Culinary Creations) demonstrated how fermentation can help reduce food waste in the kitchen by helping to preserve fruits and vegetables past their shelf life. Shown: scallops served over a fermented tomato vinaigrette. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

the summer issue of *Catersource* for more on this) for such things as dressings and vinegars. The ingredients that normally would find their way into the waste bin can now get a second lease on life.

Another food-saving option is salt curing meat for use in charcuterie, which helps to extend its shelf-life. Freeze drying and **dehydrating** are also gaining traction as a fun and innovative way to preserve fruits and vegetables for longer.

Additionally, there has been a significant shift from single-use plastic and paper products and instead opting for reusable items like china and glassware. Another sustainable option is compostable products, like those from Verterra, which provided food sampling vessels during Art of Catering Food.

A FUSION OF FLAVORS

Fusion food is so 2000. With a new definition of authenticity that encompasses background, heritage, and experience, today's culinary landscape is reinventing regional and traditional cooking. These conscious cultural combinations pay homage and respect to both roots and backgrounds—celebrating flavor, experience, and cuisine.

“Now we are blending global influences,” said Banta. “We’re talking unique combos that are blending different cultures and different flavors.”

Think: Jamaican tacos, burger quesadillas, pizza pot pies, sloppy joe bao buns, and bulgogi empanadas.

2024 will also present a growing interest in foods that mix the world of **spicy and sweet** together, known in some circles as “swicy.” While Americans love spicy foods, this “swicy” combination expands the appeal and approachability of hotter flavors. Hot honey, mango habanero, and other combinations are helping to create more complex, nuanced, and broadly appealing flavors across a range of applications.

A FLAVOR FUSION

Top right: Bold Catering & Events brought the worlds of sweet, savory, and spicy together during Art of Catering Food with a trio of macarons: a caprese macaron, a raspberry macaron with foie gras mousse, peanut butter crumble, and raspberry habanero jam; and a Crab Rangoon macaron. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Middle: During the Opening Night Party, Vestals Catering combined southern and Asian flavors with its buttermilk biscuit topped with gochujang-glazed thick cut bacon. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.

Bottom: Chefs Jay Varga (The JDK Group) and Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) showcased a trio of sauces: an Aji Amarillo Coulis, a Cranberry & Smoked Rosemary Agrodolce, and an Umeboshi Umami Sauce. Check out the recipes [here](#).



Apply Now

to Speak at Catersource + The Special Event 2025!

We just wrapped a fantastic Catersource + The Special Event 2024! We are certainly feeling inspired and energized for the year ahead. In that spirit, we'd like to share our [2025 Call for Speakers](#). Take a moment and submit your topic for this ultra-creative conference loaded with fresh and impactful content. We want to hear from you now so we can build our best program yet.

WHERE & WHEN: February 24–27 in Fort Lauderdale, FL at the Broward County Convention Center. We are partnering once again with The Special Event, with a combined tradeshow floor that will bring over 5,000 professionals and 300 suppliers together to provide an unmatched opportunity to source, network, and learn in one-sensory stimulating environment. You can immerse yourself in a spectacular event that encompasses everything catering- and event-related. The alliance of these powerful, established brands will bring unique industry all-stars from both worlds—under one roof for four momentous days.

Additionally, we'll once again be hosting [Art of Catering Food](#). Held the two days prior to Catersource Conference & Tradeshow, Art of Catering Food (AOCF) is a stand-on-its-fabulous-own event, with all the delicious samples, networking lunches, tours, parties, and togetherness you can pack into two days. Taking place at the Broward County Convention Center, the event will be highly experiential, focusing on catered events of all kinds.

OUR AUDIENCE: Our audience is in the business of helping people celebrate the most important milestones in their lives. They are on and off-premise, doing drop off delivery, executing private parties to multiple day festivals, driving food trucks, and setting up field kitchens

and events in the most unlikely of places. Caterers and event planners are some of the hardest working people in business today.

THE EDUCATION: Over 120+ sessions will span the length of the conference, within tracks such as:

- Culinary (culinary techniques, F&B trends, demos, industry concerns such as food waste)
- Event Trends & Production (events, wedding trends, destination events, more)
- Business & Professional Development (best business practices, business growth, C-level operational strategies)
- Trends & Design (related to colors, floral, lighting, venues)
- Off-Premise Catering (drop off, corporate catering, events)
- On-Premise Catering (colleges & universities, hotels, casinos, stadiums, wedding & event venue catering)
- Sales & Marketing (client-facing ideas and strategies)
- Sustainability & DEI

More interested in presenting during AOCF? Food and beverage (and recipes to accompany) are at the helm of this conference, but we are also looking for hands on activities, solutions for off-premise catering in dire or unusual conditions, outrageously creative ways to deliver the guest food experience, and more. Put your thinking cap on: what have you learned over the past year that you could share with your colleagues to make their work lives easier? What was the restaurant or food truck experience that you recreated and turned into a best-selling short plate on your wedding menus? What are your best catering hacks? What is the best way to pack a catering truck for an off-premise event?

YOUR DEADLINE: The deadline for speaker/session submissions is **June 10, 2024 at 11:59 pm CST**.

We can't hardly wait to see you next year in Fort Lauderdale!

To apply for Catersource + The Special Event: <https://cs2025.c4p.catersource.com/>

To apply for Art of Catering Food: <https://aocf2025.catersource-cfp.com/>

TECH SAVVY

Efficiency is the name of the game in catering, and technology is the linchpin; the modern kitchen is becoming a tech hub.

From **AI-powered menu customization** to blockchain-enabled supply chain transparency, catering businesses are leveraging technology to streamline operations and stay ahead of the curve. Online ordering platforms, virtual tastings, and interactive menus are becoming standard practices, catering to the digital preferences of today's consumers.

AI has emerged as an essential ingredient of food and beverage innovation. AI is being used to optimize everything from crop growth to formulating innovative products to recommending menu items to even suggesting menu names. Robin Selden with Marcia Selden Catering & Events demonstrated how to use ChatGPT during Art of Catering Food when she asked it to suggest creative menu names for shrimp meatballs. The result? Such ideas as Prawn Pops, Mariner Morsels, Neptune Nuggets, Tide-Tossed Tidbits, Seafarer Savories, and Nautical Nibbles.

AI can also be used to develop color palettes which can serve as a launching point for dialogue and conversation with clients.

There has also been a growing demand for smart appliances, such as smart ovens that can automatically adjust cooking times and temperatures based on the type of food being prepared or AI-powered refrigerators that can monitor expiration dates and suggest recipes based on the ingredients available. Even **robots** are becoming more common place.

Drones are also finding a home in the events world by helping to deliver cocktails and food to attendees.

"They will love the novelty," said Merrell.

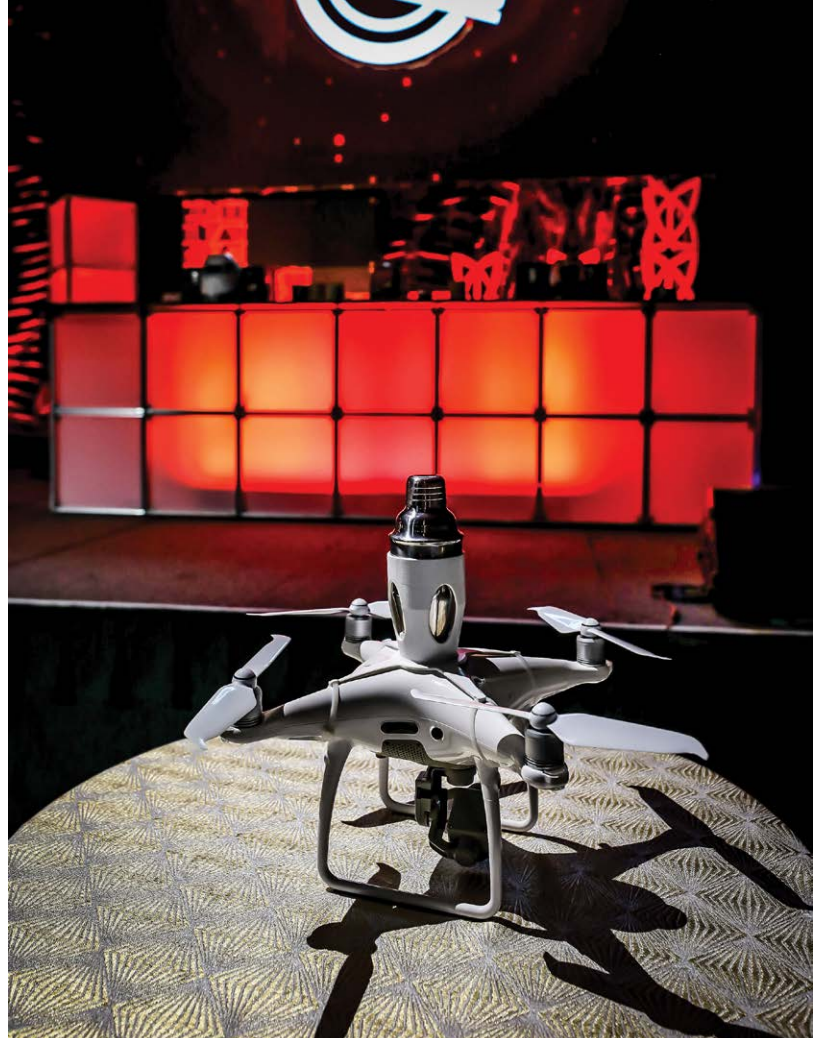
"We're reimagining the cocktail experience," added Michael Cerbelli (Cerbelli Creative) during Michael Cerbelli's: The Hot List™.

These are the trends that we think will stay popular throughout the rest of 2024; what trends caught your eye during Catersource + The Special Event? **CS**

TECH SAVVY

Top right: Michael Cerbelli's: The Hot List™ showcased a drone bartender, which can both shake and serve, during this year's event.

Bottom: Utilize man's best robot friend to help deliver to guests during events. Shown here, Michael Cerbelli (Cerbelli Creative) is gifted a bottle of water on stage.





Featured on the cover of this issue of *Catersource* is Jeremy Langemann's (Bingeman's Catering) Maple-Cured Sweetgrass Smoked Steelhead (accompanied by Corn Skillet Cakes, Saskatoon Berry Spread, and Puffed Rice & Fried Sage) which was sampled during Art of Catering Food 2024, with an assist from sponsor Sitka Seafood. —*Amber Kispert*

MAPLE-CURED, SWEETGRASS SMOKED STEELHEAD

With Corn Cake + Saskatoon

+ Sage + Wild Rice

YIELD: APPROXIMATELY 300
2-OZ PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

20 lb steelhead salmon
2 qt salt
4 T ground juniper
¼ cup ground sumac
2 qts maple syrup
2 cup agave

METHOD

1. Line multiple 2-inch full hotel pans with Saran wrap and set aside.
2. Combine brine ingredients.
3. Place salmon filet flesh side down in the hotel pan and lightly rub the skin with the brine.
4. Flip the salmon so the skin side is down, rub the remaining brine into the flesh side of the salmon.
5. Cover the salmon with the Saran wrap, ensure it is touching the flesh, and then fold over the wrap that is lining the pan.
6. Let salmon cure for 12 hours, then flip and cure for an additional 12 hours.
7. Rinse salmon under cold running water and pat dry. Refrigerate for 24 hours, unwrapped to form a pellicle.
8. Cold smoke (75°F) using sweetgrass and maple wood for 45 minutes.

CORN SKILLET CAKES

INGREDIENTS

342 g lard or butter + extra lard for frying
200 g maple sugar
400 g eggs (duck preferred, 6pc)
530 g milk (soy preferred)
234 g brown rice flour
234 g amaranth flour
357 g cornmeal
25 g baking powder
15 g sea salt
¼ cup white sage, chopped
500 g corn kernels (cooked)
10 g xanthan gum (optional)

METHOD FOR BATTER

1. Combine all wet ingredients, lard, and mix.
2. Blend in dry ingredients to form a batter.

METHOD FOR CAKES

1. Preheat a cast skillet to medium heat.
2. Add enough lard to coat the bottom of the pan.

3. Scoop batter into the skillet, approx. 30 g (.5-1 oz) portion.
4. Cook until lightly golden brown, adding lard as required, flip and cook the second side until lightly golden brown, flip over again for an additional minute, flip one last time and cook for an additional minute. *See Puffed Rice & Fried Sage, below
5. Do not refrigerate, serve at room temperature, or slightly warmed.

SASKATOON BERRY SPREAD

INGREDIENTS

750 ml fresh or frozen Saskatoon berries
250 ml maple sugar
125 ml water, or wild rice broth
6 sprigs fresh thyme
Pinch sea salt
60 ml cornstarch

METHOD

1. Combine berries and sugar in an appropriately sized pot and bring to a simmer.
2. Let cook until the berries are soft and residual moisture has reduced by half, remove from the heat, and stir in salt and fresh thyme. Let steep for 10 minutes, remove thyme and pulse two to three times in a food processor.

PUFFED RICE & FRIED SAGE


INGREDIENTS

250 ml wild rice
225 g fresh sage leaves
200 g micro amaranth,
and/or micro chervil

METHOD

1. After frying the corn cakes, remove any left-over batter crumbs.
2. Add 250 ml lard to the skillet and let melt.
3. Add sage leaves, careful they may splatter slightly, fry until dark green in color and translucent, remove and place onto a paper towel to drain.
4. Add wild rice to the lard, stir lightly and let crisp until lightly golden, remove and place onto a paper towel to let dry, lightly season with sea salt.

PROCESS TO COMPOSE DISH

Thinly slice the steelhead, spread saskatoon berry spread onto the skillet cake, place sliced steelhead on the cake and top with puffed wild rice and fried sage. Arrange neatly on live edge wood, or natural stone garnished with fresh cedar boughs. 



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CATERING TO DIVERSITY

BY AMBER KISPERT

“Curating children’s menus is so much more than opening a box of frozen chicken nuggets. Mealtime for these little kids is experiential learning, so it needs to be fun and interactive.”

—Greg Ingles, Food2You Inc. Catering



more
ggets.
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active.”

STOP KIDDING AROUND

Today's youngest diners are seeking the same elevated experiences as their parents, so your children's menus should mirror their adult counterparts.

Pint-sized gourmets have taken control of the traditional kids' table. Classic items like chicken nuggets, grilled cheese, and hamburgers aren't as enticing to tiny tastebuds as they once were. Today's Generation Alpha kids, born between 2011 and 2023, are leaning into healthier, customizable, and sophisticated options that support a more memorable dining experience.

“Kids are often an afterthought, but they really are a huge missed opportunity,” said Maeve Webster (Menu Matters) in an article for [Catersource](#).

“We need to understand that kids want to be treated the same as adults at an event, they don't want to have a sad buffet with food that is different,” adds Sarah McClure (LUX Catering & Events*). “When

Mango Lava Slushies
garnished with gummy
candies. Photo courtesy
National Mango Board

designing a menu, do your best to incorporate the kid-friendly things in the same way as the adult menus.”

From Alpha to Z

Generation Alpha, currently ages 0–13, will swiftly and decisively alter the food and beverage landscape. They are set to reach nearly two billion people globally by 2025 and will become the largest generation in history, according to *Datassential*.

The children of millennials

As the children of millennials, much of this generation’s eating habits can be attributed to their health-conscious parents calling for healthier, more varied fare on children’s menus.

“Food is so important, as we all know. Starting to indulge children in local, fresh ingredients only sets them up for success and enjoyment in the food world as they grow,” says Christina Cerri (Taste Catering & Event Planning*).

In fact, 80% of millennial parents surveyed by *Datassential* aim for a balanced diet and healthier food preferences for their children and prioritize food claims like “high protein”, “organic”, and “gluten-free” over “low fat”, “low sodium”, and “high fiber”. They also consider sustainable sourcing crucial, likely instilling these perspectives in their Generation Alpha children.

“Millennial parents are demanding, as they should be,” says Greg Ingles (Food2You Inc. Catering, which specializes in meals for early education and daycare centers). “This generation is savvy about nutrition and has more sophisticated preferences, so it is important for us to provide the best quality food

possible and introduce a variety of different foods, so their kids have a well-rounded experience of food.”

Thirty-one percent of Generation Alphas are already eating on-trend ingredients like plant-based foods, according to *Datassential*. Some of the top growing foods on kids’ menus today include beef fajitas, boneless wings, and mini quesadillas, while top ingredients, sauces, and flavors include plant-based chicken, wagyu beef, and lemon pepper.

The technology generation

Another contributor to Generation Alpha’s culinary tastes stems from their exposure to TikTok, YouTube, and other social media. For example, mini pancakes, which originally were a TikTok trend during the

pandemic, are trending on kids’ menus, growing 73% over the past four years, according to *Menu Trends*. With Generation Alpha growing up as digital natives (19% of Generation Alpha parents say their kids spend one to two hours on social media in a typical day), these budding influencers are constantly staying on top of social media food trends and melding their food preferences with their digital know-how.

Culinary travelers

Generation Alpha is experiencing more global flavors than ever before (thus developing their palates). In addition to experiencing international cuisines thanks to their Millennial foodie parents exposing them to more culturally diverse recipes, menus, and restaurants, they are also traveling more, with Millennials continuing to



During a science-themed children’s birthday party, LUX Catering & Events had a nitrogen-infused root beer float station. Photo courtesy Billow & Mull Photography



Children are very sensory, so anything that engages multiple senses (like nitrogen-infused root beer floats) is a win. Photo courtesy Billow & Mull Photography



Food2You Inc. Catering strives for keen attention to detail in every dish, and their chef-created Whole Wheat Rotini garnished with fresh basil wins rave reviews. Photo courtesy Food2You Inc. Catering



Keep children entertained during an event with hands-on activities, like this paper airplane station during LUX Catering & Events' science-themed birthday party. Photo courtesy Billow & Mull Photography

introduce their children to different countries. We also can't underestimate the importance of urbanization, which is introducing them to more cultural offerings thanks to their diverse friend and school groups.

"I find kids are enjoying more flavors and more adult flavors these days," says Cerri.

The recipe for success

By curating an elevated children's menu beyond the typical fare, caterers can not only instill new eating habits in their clients by offering a "teachable moment," but they can also earn a customer for life.

"Curating children's menus is so much more than opening a box of frozen chicken nuggets," says Ingles. "Mealtime for these little kids is experiential learning, so it needs to be fun and interactive."

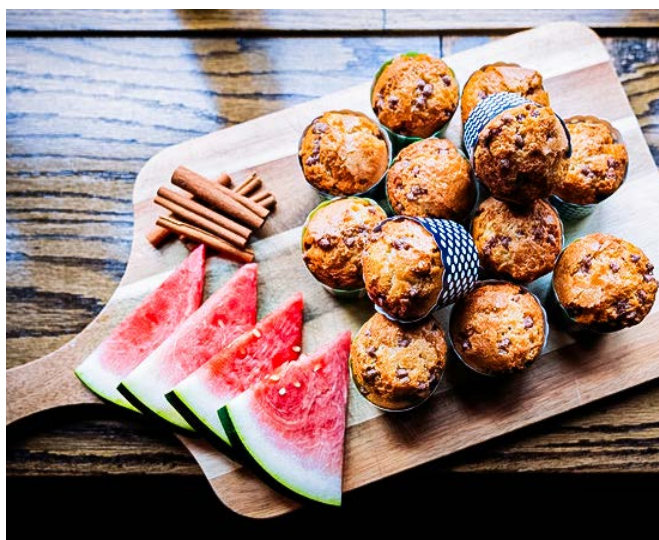
"Parents expect their children to be able to take part in events with them, so having a kid's menu should be a strong consideration for every caterer," adds Chris Olson (Land O' Lakes Foodservice). "Knowing children will be taken care of just like the adults is important for event organizers to consider so everyone feels included. There are some flavors and textures that kids don't respond well to, so having a select menu for them helps organizers streamline ordering."

Let's look at some of the different ways to set up your children's menu for success.

A dash of whimsy

Children are more likely to eat a meal that looks appealing and fun. The visual appeal of a dish can significantly impact a child's willingness to try it. Kid-friendly catering menus should feature





Top row, left: A snack box from Land O' Lakes Foodservice featuring cheddar cheese cubes, hard-boiled eggs, pretzel crisps, and strawberries. Photo courtesy Land O' Lakes Foodservice; Middle: The Ultimate Buffalo Ranch Chicken Salad (creamy white cheese sauce, buffalo-style hot sauce, ranch dressing, diced chicken, diced celery, shredded carrots, and diced red onion). Photo courtesy Land O' Lakes Foodservice; Right: Sweet sriracha chile sauce served with veggies and egg rolls. Photo courtesy Land O' Lakes Foodservice

Middle row, left: Mexican Lasagna (whole wheat tortillas, beef crumbles, Mexican seasoning, salsa, roasted corn and jalapeño blend, jalapeño cheese sauce, shredded mild cheddar cheese, and sour cream). Photo courtesy Land O' Lakes Foodservice; Middle: Food2You serves children chilled, low-fat organic milk and two varieties of fresh vegetables every day. Photo courtesy Food2You Inc. Catering; Right: Cheesy broccoli. Photo courtesy Land O' Lakes Foodservice

Bottom row, left: Food2You kids love these protein-packed Turkey Meatball Sliders with whole grain rolls. Photo courtesy Food2You Inc. Catering; Middle: Cheesy Tikka Masala (jalapeño cheese sauce, diced chicken, tomato sauce, curry powder, dehydrated onion flakes, garlic powder, chili powder, paprika, and Garam masala). Photo courtesy Land O' Lakes Foodservice; Right: Food2You's Whole Grain Cinnamon Roll Muffins with a side of fresh fruit power up little kids' mornings. Photo courtesy Food2You Inc. Catering



vibrant and colorful creations that capture the attention of young eyes. From rainbow fruit skewers to vegetable-based “rainbow” pasta, bright colors can pique a child’s interest in their food. Incorporating a variety of hues not only adds excitement to the plate but also ensures a diverse range of nutrients. “Children need so many senses stimulated, so trying to find that balance is key,” Cerri says.

Another idea is to embrace the power of the mini. Everything is more appealing when it’s miniaturized, and the same goes for food. Mini sliders, bite-sized fruit skewers, and tiny desserts are not only adorable but also encourage kids to try a variety of flavors without feeling overwhelmed. The downsized portions are perfect for little hands and appetites. Plus,

what kid doesn’t like to eat with their fingers?

“It is important to provide visual stimulation in terms of variety and color so the food looks interesting as well as tastes great,” says Ingles. “We want to help the kids develop good eating habits and when the food presentation is alluring and the food tastes great, it is easier to do that.”

A pinch of fun

Playfulness extends beyond the plate to presentation. Creative and whimsical arrangements can turn an ordinary dish into an exciting adventure. Consider serving spaghetti in muffin cups, creating edible art with fruit kabobs, or presenting desserts and sandwiches in playful, themed shapes to make the dining experience truly magical

for kids. This creativity can also extend to beverages with such options as nitrogen infused root beer floats or a color-changing lemonade station.

Kids love to be hands-on, so incorporating do-it-yourself stations can be a hit. Think make-your-own pizza, taco, or sandwich stations, allowing young diners to customize their meals.

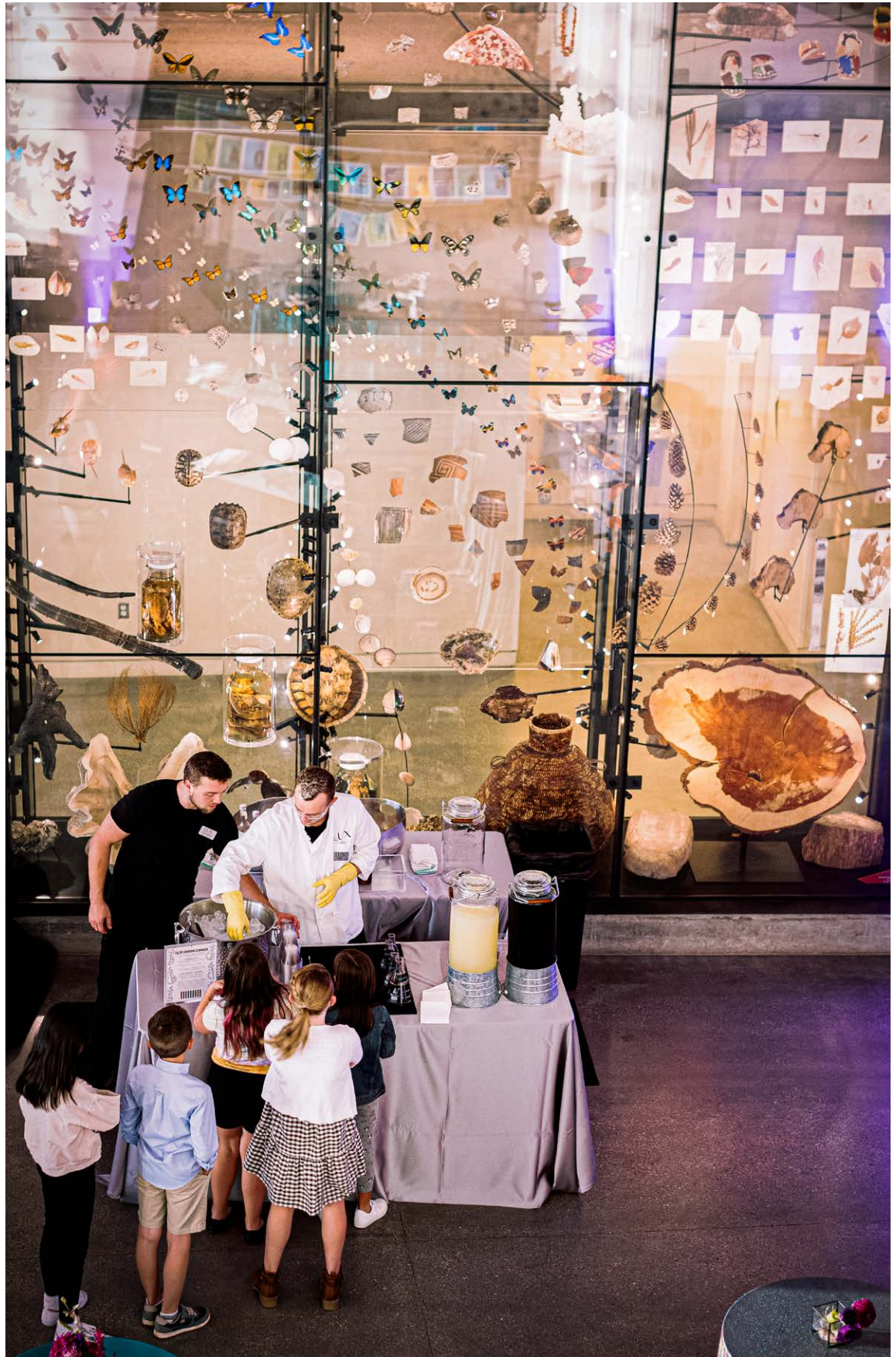
“We find kids really enjoy the interactive nature of food,” says McClure. “You could elevate something as simple as a PB&J into something incredible with the right components.”

This interactive approach not only empowers children to make choices but also turns mealtime into a fun and engaging activity.

“Think of something like a holiday party where you can incorporate



All photos this spread: During the science-themed children's birthday party, LUX Catering & Events utilized butterfly pea tea for a color-changing lemonade station. Photos courtesy Billow & Mull Photography



Chartwells K12 list of 10

POPULAR FOOD TRENDS FOR 2024

1. Creative dips

Dips add a burst of flavor and texture to dishes and can be a great way to encourage students to eat more vegetables, Chartwells K12 notes. Roasted Beet Hummus and homemade "House Special" BBQ Sauces are just some of the dips the foodservice provider serves to students.

2. TikTok takeover

Social media is influencing students' requests in the lunchroom. In response, Chartwells K12 has begun taking inspiration from recipes that have gone viral on online platforms like TikTok. The foodservice provider aims to make the recipes served in school healthier than their online counterparts by swapping out certain ingredients. For example, instead of serving a baked feta pasta, Chartwells K12 chefs opted for a penne with spinach, bacon, and grape tomatoes.

3. Mini is mighty

Operators may want to incorporate miniature versions of students' favorite dishes into their menus this upcoming year. Students are becoming drawn to menu items such as mini waffles, pulled pork sliders, and more.

4. Global eats

Global dining continues to be popular with Generation Alpha. Latin American and Asian cuisines seem to be of particular interest to this age group. Examples: Caribbean Chicken Fricassee and Gochujang Chicken Lettuce Cups are some of the global offerings that Chartwells K12 has introduced to its menus.

5. Specialty drinks

Specialty beverages are striking a chord with young eaters. Chartwells K12 is playing up this trend through menu items such as its Avocado Mango Kale Smoothie and Hot Chocolate Milk.

6. Bold spices

Students continue to love dishes with bold seasonings. Using spices also allows chefs to cut back on sodium, says Chartwells K12. Chartwells uses spices to bring bold flavors to dishes like its Thai Style Chicken & Noodle Salad and Honey BBQ Sriracha Chicken Grain Bowl.

7. Alternative proteins

Students see alternative proteins as a way to better their health and protect the planet. A Spicy Avocado Mushroom Quesadilla and Black Bean Sopes are some of the plant-based items offered at Chartwells K12 cafeterias.

8. Noodles everywhere

Noodle dishes of all shapes and sizes are beloved by students. Operators can opt for comfort food favorites such as Buffalo Chicken Mac & Cheese or put a global spin on the ingredient.

9. In-season ingredients

Menu items that feature farm-to-school ingredients remain popular with students. Operators can further the connection students have with their food through school gardens, partnering with local farms, and more.

10. Food on the run

Soba Noodle Bento Boxes and Homemade Pumpkin Bars are some of the many grab-and-go offerings available to students at Chartwells K12 cafeterias. As kids continue to be busier than ever, they are searching for more meals they can eat on the go.

Information above courtesy Chartwells K12



Since 2006, Zest Kids has offered customized children's party menus with fun and delicious presentations (like these ice cream cookie sandwiches) based on the personality of each child. Photo courtesy Rogerio Voltan for Zest Kids

Fastest Growing

DISHES FOR KIDS

.....

Beef Fajita

Boneless Wings

Mini Quesadillas

White Rice

Pho

Sweet Tea

Tater Tots

Chicken Quesadillas

Seasoned Fries

Mini Pancakes

Fastest Growing

INGREDIENTS AND SAUCES/ FLAVORS FOR KIDS

.....

Plant Based Chicken

Wagyu

Lemon Pepper

Sriracha

Honey BBQ

Chipotle

Chickpea

Vegan

Buffalo

Feta

Information above courtesy Datassential

a gingerbread making area for children,” says Cerri. “You’re able to keep them entertained and busy while the adults mingle.”

A dollop of creativity

When developing your children’s menus, let your staff flex their culinary creativity by developing new dishes.

“We do not like to pander to kids when it comes to the menus we prepare—they would eat mac and cheese every day if they could,” says Ingles. “When developing our menus, we look at it from an adult perspective first and then modify it for preferences of kids.”

One place to start when developing your children’s menus is to look at your adult menus for reference. You

can simply reduce portions of a few adult offerings and give them a kid-friendly flair.

“We do try to put our own stamp on it,” says Cerri. “Whether that is adding some new flavors or making the design a little more interesting.”

Remember though, it’s important for your menus to appeal to both parents and children alike.

“One of unique challenges is keeping everyone happy; you want the kids to love your food because they are the ones eating it of course, but you also have to balance their preferences with their parents’ expectations,” says Ingles. “Kids take their lead from adults—if they love our food and sing its praises the kids are more apt to try it too.”

So, what are you waiting for? You officially have permission to play with your food.

“Take the reins and be the concierge for your clients, show them you’re the expert and make planning their menu easy and seamless,” says McClure. “It’s a blast to reimagine something that may be simpler culinary-wise but design it to be more than just a hot dog.

“It’s a great time to dial into your own childhood and think of things you wish you would’ve seen as a kid.”

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Breakfast Breaks Free

Traditional breakfast fare is giving way to elevated offerings all throughout the day (not just in the morning)

Breakfast, often hailed as the most important meal of the day, has long held a prominent place in cultures worldwide. But, as lifestyles evolve and dietary trends shift, the concept of breakfast has adapted, giving rise to a plethora of options ranging from traditional hearty fare to innovative and convenient choices. Gone are the days of the all-American style breakfast plates; today's caterers are thinking outside the breakfast box in terms of service, menus, and even time of day.

"I think that during the pandemic folks started to really experience food in different ways, breakfast being near the top of that," says Chef Joe Pina (Sodexo), who presented on the topic of breakfast during Catersource + The Special Event 2022.



Hell's Kitchen in Minneapolis offers an impressive weekend Bloody Mary bar with all the fixin's: 243 different hot sauces, gourmet rim salts, olives, meats, cheeses, peppers, and even candy. Photo courtesy Hell's Kitchen



PASTRAMI HASH

Recipe and photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events

YIELD: 20

INGREDIENTS FOR PASTRAMI HASH

- 2½ lb Navel beef pastrami
- 3 lb Brussels sprouts
- 2½ lb sweet potatoes
- 20 ea. poached eggs
- 35 oz chipotle hollandaise (recipe right)
- 20 oz rice-yuzu vinaigrette (recipe right)
- 2½ oz green onion

METHOD

1. Blanch Brussels sprouts halves.
2. Par-bake sweet potato.
3. Combine the vegetables and deep fry for one minute at 350°.
4. On a flat top, cook the pastrami until golden brown.
5. In a mixing bowl toss the vegetables with the rice-yuzu vinaigrette.
6. Plate the vegetables at the bottom and place the pastrami on top, creating a

nest where you will place the poached eggs that were previously cooked.

7. Finish the plating with the chipotle hollandaise and garnish with thinly sliced green onion.

INGREDIENTS FOR CHIPOTLE

HOLLANDAISE

- 9 ea. egg yolks, at room temperature
- 6 tsp lemon juice
- 3 T chipotle peppers in adobo sauce
- ¾ tsp sugar
- 4 sticks of unsalted butter
- Salt to taste

METHOD

1. Place the butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat until melted and hot. Alternatively, you can melt the butter in the microwave; make sure to cover it and that the butter is hot. If the butter is not hot, it will not emulsify.
2. Add the egg yolks, 1 T hot water, chipotle pepper, salt, sugar, and lemon

juice to the blender. Blend for 10 seconds till it is well combined; keep the blender running on medium-high and slowly stream melted hot butter into the mixture. Blend for another 30-45 seconds until emulsified. If the hollandaise is too thick, slowly drizzle in another tablespoon of hot water and blend until combined.

3. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

INGREDIENTS FOR

RICE-YUZU VINAIGRETTE

- 4 oz seasoned rice wine vinegar
- 2 oz yuzu juice
- 18 oz grapeseed oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

Combine all ingredients. Before using the vinaigrette make sure to shake for each dish.



POACHED EGGS + SPINACH

Recipe and photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events

YIELD: 20

INGREDIENTS FOR POACHED EGGS + SPINACH

40 ea. poached eggs
60 ea. toasted focaccia crostini
60 oz tangy yogurt sauce (recipe right)
10 oz Urfa chili oil (recipe right)
1 oz sesame seeds
4 oz roasted pepita seeds
20 oz spinach

METHOD

1. In order, plate the tangy yogurt sauce and sautéed spinach.

2. Place the poached eggs in the center with the toasted focaccia.
3. Drizzle the warm Urfa chili oil and garnish with the pepita and sesame seeds mixture.

INGREDIENTS FOR TANGY YOGURT SAUCE

60 oz Greek yogurt
6 oz lemon juice
1 oz lemon zest
2 oz garlic paste
Salt

METHOD

Combine all ingredients and whisk together in a bowl and season to taste with salt.

INGREDIENTS FOR URFA CHILI OIL

4 oz Urfa chili
4 oz grapeseed oil
2 oz butter
1 tsp cumin
1 tsp smoked paprika
Salt and pepper

METHOD

1. At very low heat simmer all ingredients for 10 minutes.
2. Keep warm and use as needed.

Top of the morning

Why the sudden surge in breakfast events? The answer lies in the changing lifestyles and preferences of attendees.

“I think people are working harder and longer days, and it does not always allow for late evenings anymore, or perhaps they have kids now, so that is a change to the schedule,” says Gerald Luna (B Street Waffles).

“With people leading busier lives, there's a growing appreciation for the importance of starting the day with a nutritious meal,” Sebastian Centner (Eatertainment Events & Catering) adds.

People are looking for innovative ways to engage and connect, and the breakfast setting provides a relaxed and casual atmosphere that encourages networking and socializing, making them popular choices for corporate meetings, networking events, and weekend gatherings with friends and family.

“They offer a refreshing and alternative experience,” says Sarah Kuhlberg (Colette's Catering & Events).

“They provide a relaxed atmosphere and cater to a diverse range of dietary preferences, making them inclusive and appealing to a broad audience. Brunch is breakfast's weekend alter ego—laid-back, inviting, and with an excuse to sip mimosas before noon. Plus, people are realizing that a good breakfast sets the tone for the day.”

In fact, more than three in five Americans (62%) say that breakfast is their favorite meal of the day, according to General Mills Foodservice.

“The love for breakfast that people have is unmatched,” says Pina.

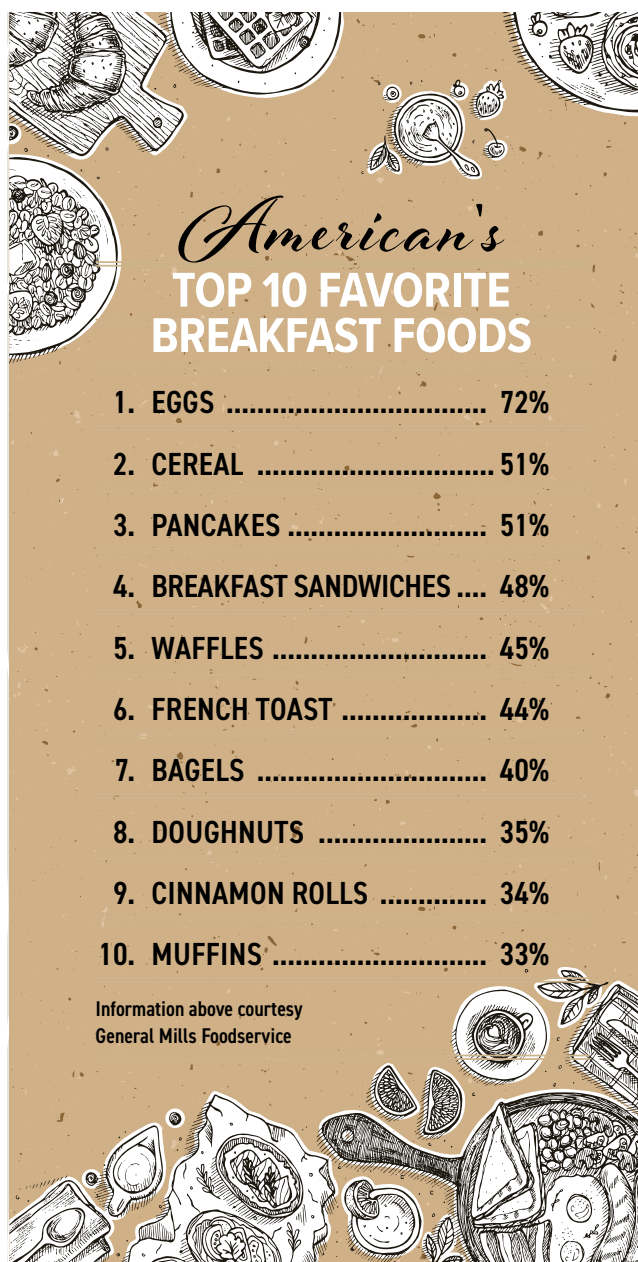
One way to infuse creativity into your breakfast or brunch gatherings is by incorporating themes. Whether it's a tropical beach breakfast with exotic fruits and smoothie bowls or a vintage brunch with classic dishes and décor, themed events add an extra layer of excitement (turn to page 26 in *Special Events* magazine at the back of this issue for more on themed events).

An added bonus to breakfast? “The food cost of serving breakfast items generally is much lower, pushes profits, and generates excitement for your selling product,” says Pina.

Sunnyside-up service

As the breakfast trend gains popularity, it's imperative to find creative ways to elevate the experience. One of the first places to start is with the type of service.

“Fresh fruit for a breakfast buffet used to be the old hotel style: slice it, platter it up, maybe decorate it a little bit,” said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during Catersource + The Special Event 2023. “Now, it's all about abundance, it's all about choice, it's all about





RIBEYE “STEAK & EGGS” BREAKFAST SANDO with Boursin Cheese & Balsamic Glaze

Recipe and photo courtesy Chef Joe Pina, Bridgewater State University (Sodexo)

YIELD: 2

INGREDIENTS

- 10 oz shaved ribeye
- 3 oz red onions
- 4 oz Boursin cheese
- 3 ea. eggs
- 1 oz balsamic glaze
- 2 ea. ciabatta or Telera rolls
- 5 T butter

METHOD

1. First, trim ribeye and freeze. Once solid pull from freezer and slice.
2. Take red onions and julienne. Take 2½ T of butter and over medium heat begin to caramelize onions.
3. Take remaining butter and toast the rolls.
4. Begin cooking the ribeye and season with salt and pepper. While that is cooking begin to scramble the eggs. Cook them at the same time as the ribeye.
5. To assemble: Put the caramelized onions on the bottom, followed by the ribeye. Lay the scrambled egg patty down and drizzle with balsamic glaze. Spread a thick layer of the Boursin cheese on the top crown of the roll.
6. Serve immediately and enjoy!

that amazing display that just grabs your eye. You can't just rely on the attraction of the food itself anymore.”

Consider replacing the standard buffet with interactive gourmet stations. Think made-to-order omelet bars, build-your-own breakfast sandwich stations, a pancake and waffle bar, a fresh fruit and yogurt parfait setup, oatmeal bars, crepe stations, and of course everyone's favorite, the doughnut or bagel wall. Add a touch of fun and creativity by playing with shapes, colors, and textures. Try crafting pancake art, rainbow fruit skewers, or granola cups to make breakfast not only visually appealing but also a delightful culinary experience.

“I believe that stations are so key,” says Pina. “They can give tapas-style items where guests can really try so many items and you won't feel trapped into one item to fill them up.”

On the beverage side of things, think artisanal coffees and teas as well as mimosa or Bloody Mary bars.

“Customization really is key at breakfast events,” says Centner, “it allows guests to tailor their breakfast experience to their preferences.”

Rise and shine

Beyond the style of service, how food is presented is also key. Visual appeal and “Instagrammability” have played a large part in why brunch has become such big business.

“Breakfast items offer a versatile canvas for culinary creativity,” says Centner. “It's also fun to get creative with the format of a dish, going with the unexpected.”

“Breakfast can be elevated by focusing on quality ingredients, innovative presentation, and culinary craftsmanship. Incorporating unexpected flavor combinations, experimenting with unique textures, and paying attention to plating aesthetics can elevate traditional breakfast dishes to gourmet culinary experiences.”

A key to elevating breakfast offerings is to invest in fresh, local ingredients.

“Build something with ingredients a customer knows, but in a very unique way,” says Pina.

Also, get creative with your presentation and your flavor combinations.



The love for breakfast that people have is unmatched.”

— Joseph Pina, Sodexo



KAYA TOAST WITH COCONUT JAM AND EGG CLOUD

*Recipe courtesy Lon Symensma,
ChoLon Modern Asian*

Photo courtesy Kikkoman

YIELD: 24

INGREDIENTS FOR COCONUT JAM

1,125 g coconut milk
600 g sugar
10 g salt
587 g whole eggs
200 g egg yolks
2 ea. pandan leaves

INGREDIENTS FOR EGG CLOUD FOAM

506 g whole eggs
113 g butter, melted and cooled
85 g milk
6 g salt

INGREDIENTS FOR THE PLATE

Pullman bread sliced ½-inch thick,
crusts removed
Butter

Coconut Jam (recipe, left)
Egg Cloud Foam (recipe, left)
Coarsely ground white pepper
Kikkoman® Soy Sauce in a mister

METHOD

1. To prepare Coconut Jam, purée all ingredients except pandan leaves. Pour equal amounts of mixture into two Cryovac bags, adding one pandan leaf per bag; vacuum and seal bags. Cook in a sous vide bath at 180°F for one hour or until completely cooked and thickened. Remove mixture from bag and blend with a large immersion blender. Press through a chinois and place in a large bowl. Cover the surface directly with plastic wrap to avoid forming a skin while it cools.
2. To prepare Egg Cloud Foam, purée all ingredients and place in a medium sized Cryovac bag. Vacuum and seal bag. Cook in a sous vide bath at 162.5°F. Cook for

10 minutes, then remove bag from water and knead bag slightly to mix. Cook for a few minutes more or until slightly thickened, but not curdled. (Mixture will cook quickly at this point.) Strain through a China cap. Pour into CSI gun and dispense two nitrous canisters into gun, shaking vigorously between each charger.

3. When ready to serve, butter bread and toast until golden brown on both sides. Spread Coconut Jam generously on one side of toast.
4. Dispense the Egg Cloud Foam into small ramekins; top with pepper and a mist of soy sauce. Place a ramekin on plate with bread and serve immediately.

NOTE: For a slightly different twist, sliced rustic bread may be substituted for the Pullman bread.

From taking steak and eggs to an elevated filet mignon topped with a poached egg and chipotle bechamel or building the ultimate breakfast sandwich with shaved ribeye, eggs, Boursin cheese, and balsamic glaze, these items will bring your breakfast to the next level.

“Elevating food at breakfast and at brunch isn’t just about steak and eggs, it’s reinventing steak and eggs into an hors d’oeuvre,” said Stavros. “I love breakfast hors d’oeuvres and breakfast small plates because it’s a great way to control costs, it’s a great way to control the flow of food out to the floor, and it works great within a

client’s timeline and just presents a gorgeous piece of food.”

According to General Mills Foodservice, 66% of Americans love a creative twist on breakfast menu items.

“Experimenting with gourmet twists on traditional breakfast items can add a touch of sophistication,” adds Kuhlberg.

Beyond traditional breakfast

One of the biggest trends in breakfast currently is fusion cuisine and international influences, providing a diverse and culturally rich culinary experience.

“Don’t get us wrong—a simple bacon, egg, and cheese biscuit needs no improvement,” says Carizza Rose (24 Carrots Catering & Events). “But breakfast foods are not inherently upscale, so we love any opportunity to get creative and play with our food to offer tasty twists on traditional bites.”

Offer a breakfast buffet featuring items like Japanese matcha pancakes, Spanish churro bites, or Indian masala omelets. Think savory options like shakshuka, ramen noodles with soft scrambled eggs, huevos rancheros, or congee that bring a spicy and satisfying dimension to breakfast.

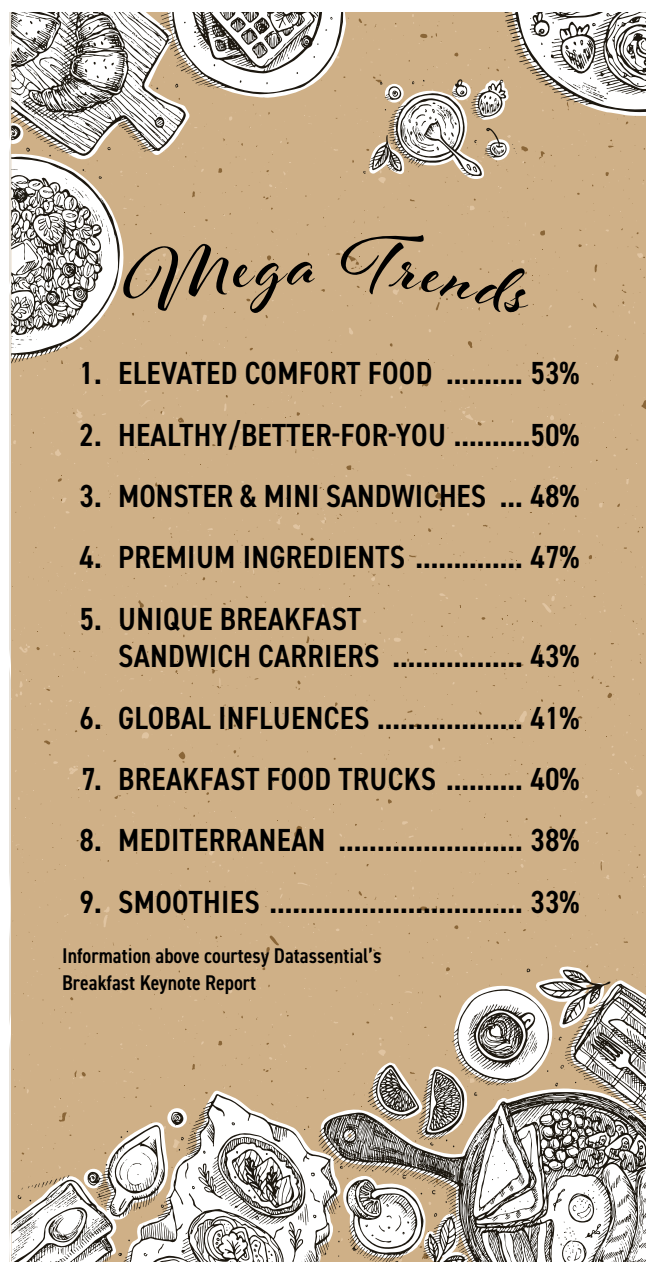
Breakfast foods aren’t solely reserved for early mornings anymore, either. As breakfast transcends its traditional time slot, caterers are finding innovative ways to serve morning delights during lunches, afternoon breaks, and even during evening events.

“Our breakfast foods should be able to be enjoyed any time of day,” says Rose. “‘Breakfast for Dinner’ is the epitome of this—who doesn’t love a late-night waffle or melty egg and cheese sandwich? It seems wrong in theory, but it tastes so right!”

According to General Mills Foodservice, three-quarters (79%) of Americans have eaten breakfast foods for meals other than breakfast in the past year.

“Repurposing breakfast items for other meals offers a creative and versatile approach to culinary experimentation,” says Luna.

Leftover pancakes or waffles can transform into mini pizzas, sliders, or sandwiches. Croque madames with quail eggs can be served as bite-sized hors d’oeuvres. Yogurt parfaits, cinnamon rolls, and waffles can be transformed into desserts. Why have a BLT when you





SALMON PASTRAMI FLATBREAD

*Recipe and photo courtesy 24 Carrots
Catering & Events*

INGREDIENTS

3" x 8" flatbread
3 lbs salmon filets, skin on, deboned,
and trimmed
12 oz course salt
12 oz granulated sugar
1 T fennel seed, toasted and ground
1 T coriander seed, toasted and ground
1½ cups molasses
1 tsp cayenne pepper
1 T paprika
1 T brown sugar
1 T garlic powder
1 cup crème fraîche
Meyer lemon
Caviar, for garnish
Micro herbs, to finish

METHOD

1. Combine the course salt and granulated sugar. Place a rack on a sheet pan. Place salmon on the rack, skin side down. Cover the flesh of the salmon with the salt and sugar mixture. Cover and place in fridge to cure for a minimum of 24 hours, no longer than 32 hours. Remove from fridge and rinse in cold water. Pat dry. Place a new rack on top of a new baking sheet. Place salmon on the new rack and set aside.
2. Combine ground fennel seed, ground coriander, paprika, brown sugar, and garlic powder until well-combined. Set aside. Combine Meyer Lemon and crème fraîche. Set aside.
3. Combine the molasses and cayenne pepper in a small pot. Warm over low

heat until combined and loosed in consistency. Brush the glaze onto the salmon. Sprinkle the spice mixture over the salmon flesh as much as possible. Cover and refrigerate salmon for 12 hours.

TO ASSEMBLE

Preheat oven to 450°. Toast the flatbread in the oven until crisp around the edges and golden brown. Slice salmon to paper-thin slices. Spread crème fraîche mixture on flatbread. Lay salmon slices on top. Garnish with micro greens and a small dollop of caviar. Cut into pieces and serve.



MINI POTATO WAFFLE BITES

Recipe and photo courtesy 24 Carrots Catering & Events

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups shredded potatoes
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp pepper
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- ¼ cup onion, grated
- 2 T butter, melted
- 2 oz white cheddar, shredded
- 1½ cups bacon, cooked and julienned
- 1 cup crème fraîche
- 1 oz chives, chopped
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- ½ T roasted garlic, puréed
- Micro parsley, to finish

METHOD

1. Combine crème fraîche and chopped chives, lemon juice, and roasted garlic. Set aside.

2. Combine dry ingredi
- eggs, onion, and but
- reach batter-like con
3. Preheat oven and wa
- waffle maker with co
- ouces of batter, close
- and golden brown, a
- Remove from waffle
- squares.
4. Place waffle bites on
- shredded white chee
- to five minutes or un

TO ASSEMBLE

- Remove waffles from o
- crème fraîche, bacon, a



NUTELLA STUFFED CRÈME BRÛLÉE FRENCH TOAST W SANDWICHES and Berries

Recipe and photo courtesy Chef Joe Pina, Bridgewater State University (Sodexo)

YIELD: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 12 ea. slightly stale slices brioche
- 2 cups whole milk
- 3 ea. eggs
- 2 T sugar
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp salt
- 6 oz Nutella
- Butter, for cooking
- Turbinado raw sugar, for garnish
- Fresh whipped cream, for garnish
- Fresh berries, for garnish

METHOD

1. To make the French toast, lay out six slices of the bread and spread the Nutella filling evenly on each of them. Top each with one of the remaining slices of bread.

2. In a medium bowl, w
- sugar, vanilla, and s
- a wide, shallow pan.
- egg mixture and let t
- 30 seconds. Turn the
- other side soak.
3. Heat griddle over me
- melted, lift the sandw
- and transfer them to
- and golden on the bo
- them, sprinkle a laye
- top of each sandwich
4. To serve cut the san
- sugar side up. Serve
- berries.

ents with shredded potato,
ter. Mix until ingredients
sistency.
affle maker to 325°. Coat
oking spray. Add three
e lid, and cook until crispy
out three to four minutes.
maker and cut into bite-size

a sheet pan and top with
eddar. Bake in the over for four
til the cheeses is melted

ven and top with garlic chive
and micro parsley to serve.

can have a mini potato waffle with
applewood-smoked bacon, melted
white cheddar, and garlic crème fraîche?
Instead of chicken and waffles, consider
a maple-glazed fried chicken slider with
freshly made beignets for buns.

“Each offers something familiar with
a bit of sophistication and a side of
nostalgia—an ideal combination for an
elevated breakfast bite,” says Rose.
The unexpected fusion of breakfast and
dinner creates a unique and delightful
dining experience.

Extend the festivities into the late hours
with interactive late-night breakfast
stations. Think of a “midnight breakfast”
spread with indulgent offerings like
bacon-wrapped French toast bites, mini

maple-glazed sausage skewers, and a
selection of gourmet doughnuts.

As breakfast finds its way onto
the menu beyond traditional morning
hours, the possibilities for creating
memorable and unique events are endless.

“Caterers should remember that
breakfast catering isn't just about
the food; it's also about creating a
welcoming and inviting atmosphere,”
says Centner. “Pay attention to
presentation, ambiance, and hospitality
to ensure that breakfast events leave a
lasting impression on guests.”

So, rise and shine—the future of breakfast
events is looking deliciously bright!

Bon appetit! 

With Whipped Cream

Whisk together the milk, eggs,
salt, then pour the custard into
Place sandwiches into the
them soak until soft, about
sandwiches over and let the

medium heat. Add butter. Once
wiches from the egg mixture
the griddle. Cook until firm
bottom. Just before you flip
er of turbinado sugar on the
n and cook the other side.
dwiches in half, caramelized
with whipped cream and



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Tasting Notes:



Expert Tips

for Curating the Perfect
Tasting Experience



The JDK Group's culinary team plates up during a group tasting event. Photo courtesy Philter Photography

In

the dynamic landscape of the catering industry, creating memorable experiences is paramount in every situation.

One exceptional way to captivate your clients' attention and taste buds from the very beginning is by curating a thoughtfully crafted tasting experience.

From engaging the senses to showcasing your culinary expertise, a well-executed tasting experience can set the stage for successful partnerships and unforgettable events.

"Tastings are a great way to showcase what we can do and to let the client experience their event without all the distractions that can occur at the actual event," says Karen O'Connor (Daniel et Daniel Catering & Events). "It instills confidence in our clients that we will facilitate their having an amazing event."

While tastings can be one of the most effective ways to showcase what you have to offer, they also serve as an opportunity to distinguish yourself from the competition and help customers better understand your company while they're shopping around.

However, hosting a tasting experience is a lot more than bringing out a few dishes for a client to sample. Let's look at some of the best ways to elevate a tasting beyond the basics.

Setting the table for success

There's a bit of duality in terms of perspective on client tastings. On one end, caterers can offer a completely private and customized tasting experience. This allows caterers to really get to know their clients and what their expectations are.

"It gives us the opportunity to get to know our clients more on a personal level," says Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events).

Conversely, group tastings are becoming increasingly popular among caterers because

By Amber Kispert

it allows them to showcase their service efficiently to a larger group of clients. These clients typically aren't looking for a fully customized experience; rather, they are looking for a "taste" of a caterer's curated menu offerings.

"There are people that just need a little bit of direction," said Chef Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) during a webinar with the International Caterers Association. "They don't really know what they need, but they don't necessarily need a tasting. They just need to know what food is [available] and how to organize a menu, and group tastings are a way to weed out some of these [individual] tastings that we don't need to be doing."

"You need to make sure the couples being invited are the right fit for a group tasting," adds Jay Varga (The

JDK Group). "Otherwise, if you end up with an unhappy couple, you'll still find yourself doing a private tasting with them again anyway."

Caterers can also be of two minds about whether or not to charge for a tasting. While some caterers offer completely complimentary tastings regardless of whether the clients have booked or not, others only offer complimentary tastings for those clients who have already signed on the dotted line. Group tastings typically carry with them a fee on all fronts.

"It is worth it for you in the luxury market to spend some money to do it properly," said Marcy Blum (Marcy Blum Associates) during last year's Catersource + The Special Event's opening keynote. "It is worth it to you to take the risk and do a

tasting on spec; you have to spend money to make money."

Not everyone sees it this way though.

"I believe you should always charge for tastings," says Varga. "Your company is still putting in the costs and labor for food and chefs to make these tastings happen, and you should be compensated for those numbers. Whether you build it right into their contract or charge separately, it's still money out of pocket to put on a tasting."

One of the biggest challenges with tastings is trying to balance the client's expectations with what a caterer can successfully execute on site.

"Doing something for two people is very different from doing it for 300," says O'Connor.



A key element of a successful tasting is to bring out the chef, which helps drive home the message. Shown in center of room: Chef Jay Varga, Executive Chef for The JDK Group, speaks to couples during a group tasting event. Photo courtesy The JDK Group



Blue Plate Catering has several designated tasting rooms within its facility where they host their private tasting experiences. The rooms can each be customized to the client's event and preferences. Photo courtesy Blue Plate Catering



Top: Tastings are a great opportunity to not only personalize (such as offering a welcome cocktail) but they also offer a chance for upselling. Shown: The JDK Group showcases its beverage board upgrade; Above: Presentation is always essential during a tasting, so take the time to plate beautifully and add garnishes. Photos courtesy Philter Photography

Special requests

The first step in planning a successful tasting experience is to first understand the client's vision for the event. What are their preferences? Are they wanting a full custom menu, or are they okay selecting from your curated menus? Do they want plated service, a buffet setup, or food stations? What is their budget? What are their priorities? Is there a theme? Schedule a consultation to discuss their event goals, dietary restrictions, preferred cuisine, and desired atmosphere. This insight will serve as the foundation for tailoring the tasting experience to their unique needs, ensuring a personalized and memorable encounter.

"It is very important to make sure that we fully understand the clients' tastes and preferences beforehand so that we are showcasing a menu that features the flavor profiles they are looking for and matches their budget," says O'Connor.

"It's such an intimate process, you're working with these couples for over a year," adds Selden.

An important thing to note here, however, is that sometimes planners may request to serve as a sort of go-between with high-end luxury clients.

"We've had times where the planner held all her cards and didn't tell us anything about dietary restrictions," said Selden during a session at this year's Catersource + The Special Event on tastings. "You need to insist on speaking with your clients when you're working with a planner."

This planning stage is a great opportunity to schedule a pre-tasting with planners.

"We are able to give them clues and tricks and insight they wouldn't get otherwise," said Blum. "You are impressing the planner first and foremost."

Don't forget to ask the planner for their opinions, too.

“Please be a planner with an opinion,” said Jeffrey Selden during the tasting session at this year’s Catersource + The Special Event. “I don’t want to do a ton of tastings if you’re not going to be the person to support us.”

In addition to having an open line of communication between caterer, planner, and client, there also must be strong communication in-house between the front and back of house, more specifically between the sales and culinary teams.

“Sales and culinary need to be cohesive,” said Chef Charles Haracz (Blue Plate Catering) during a session on tastings at this year’s Catersource + The Special Event. “We’re not going in blindly; we’re preparing ourselves ahead of time.”

“We need to know what’s going on with the food from the sales side too,” said Trish Vogel (Blue Plate Catering) during the tasting session.

Food for thought

A successful tasting experience hinges on the variety and quality of the dishes presented. Aim to showcase a diverse range of flavors, textures, and cooking techniques that align with your client’s preferences. Incorporate signature dishes that represent your catering brand, but also introduce innovative and seasonally inspired options to demonstrate your versatility.

“It is called a tasting for a reason, the biggest challenge is making sure you have the right mindset going in that whoever is tasting the food may not love it whether it’s a great dish or not; you are just learning what they are looking for and how you can accommodate their likes and dislikes,” says Varga. “I definitely think there are instances where a tasting is not necessary, especially if you have streamlined menus. There are plenty of menu items that should speak for themselves, especially if it is a dish that



Top: Blue Plate Catering's Italian buffet tasting setup; Above: Blue Plate Catering's Nosh Station tasting setup. Photos courtesy Blue Plate Catering

“I definitely think there are instances where a tasting is not necessary, especially if you have streamlined menus. There are plenty of menu items that should speak for themselves, especially if it is a dish that everyone is familiar with.” —Jay Varga

everyone is familiar with. Chicken Marsala is Chicken Marsala, you either like it or you don't.”

When considering how many choices to offer, it's best to provide options, but not so many that the clients feel overwhelmed. For example, The JDK Group offers four hors d'oeuvres and four entrée choices. Desserts and salads aren't typically part of the lineup unless it's a custom private tasting. Marcia Selden Catering & Events on the other hand will typically showcase 10 to 12 hors d'oeuvres, two to three appetizers, four to five entrées, and a mixture of desserts. Blue Plate Catering will showcase eight to 10 hors d'oeuvres, three first courses,

four to six entrées, eight desserts, and four late-night snacks.

A successful tasting experience goes beyond taste alone—it engages all the senses. Consider incorporating interactive elements, such as live cooking demonstrations, or set up different food stations to captivate your clients visually and allow them to experience the culinary process firsthand. Share anecdotes and stories about the origin and inspiration behind each dish, creating a multi-sensory journey that adds depth to the tasting experience.

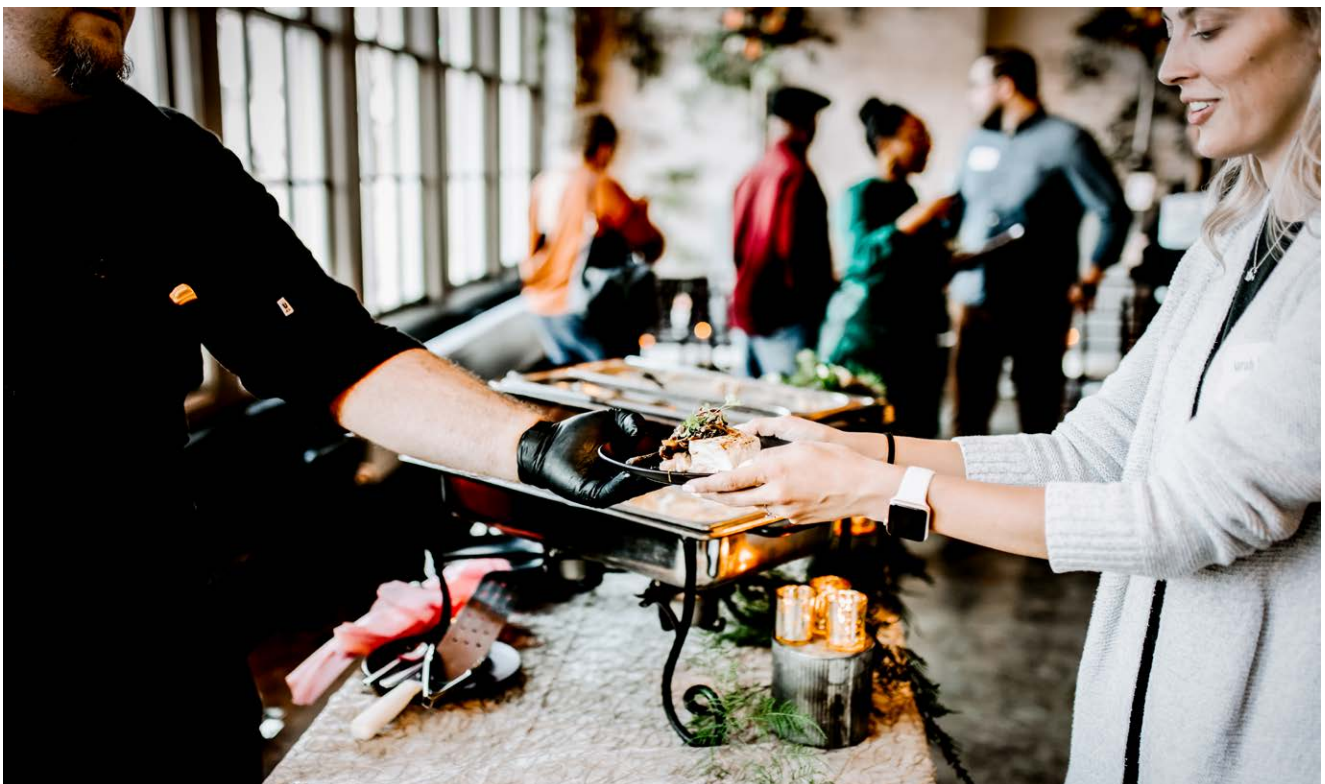
“When in doubt, bring the chef out,” said Vogel. “Whenever there's a chef in the room, people gravitate, and

we capitalize on that by having our chefs in the room. That white coat is a great asset to us and our tastings.”

Varga agrees.

“That personal connection is half the battle,” says Varga. “They must feel comfortable with who we are. They know our food is going to taste good, I just need them to know that they're in good hands.”

The way you present your dishes is also as important as their taste. Pay meticulous attention to plating and garnishing, ensuring each dish is visually appealing. Invest in high-quality tableware and utensils to enhance the overall presentation. Consistency in portion sizes and



Showcase various service styles during your tasting (plated, buffet, and stations) in order to illustrate your team's versatility. Photo courtesy Philter Photography

attention to detail will not only showcase your professionalism but also provide a preview of the caliber of service clients can expect at their events. Be warned though, this level of presentation can result in a lot of food waste depending on how many people are in the tasting, and how many choices they will be sampling. Blue Plate Catering combats some of this food waste by delivering a “show plate” and smaller tasting size plates to each guest in a tasting.

“There’s an incredible amount of food that is utilized, so there’s a tremendous amount of waste,” said Haracz. “So, the first thing that comes out is the beautiful plate that they’ll see at the event, and then we come around with the small tasting plates; that way they’re tasting just the bite for the flavor.”

Also, don’t be afraid to present additional items that may not be requested. This is an opportunity to upsell and to really showcase what you know you do well.

“We start to build our menu off of that but then our chefs also pick some items to showcase that aren’t on anyone’s menu that we know we do really well,” says Varga.

Sometimes caterers even present a “chef’s tasting menu” where they select the dishes they want to feature; this works well for events that are a long way out, and what ingredients will be available can’t be guaranteed.

“We can say to them that ‘These are our favorite dishes and we just wanted to give you a taste of what we can do for you,’” said Robin Selden, “‘but, this won’t necessarily be your menu.’”

Also, consider giving clients some privacy during the tasting so that they don’t feel nervous about discussing their opinions. Still, don’t be afraid to ask for their feedback.

“Not only do we get to wow them with our deliciousness and impress them with our attention



Each tasting plate should be as uniform as if it was an actual wedding.
Photo courtesy Philter Photography

to detail and service,” adds Robin Selden, “but we also can show our flexibility as often times when they are tasting things, they’ll have small tweaks and suggestions that we can act on immediately and show them alternatives.”

Deliver a moment

The ambiance of the tasting also plays a pivotal role in the overall experience. This is where you can really set yourself apart.

“The reality is you’re creating some excitement,” said Dan Joseph (Blue Plate Catering) during the tasting session at Catersource + The Special Event. “I don’t care if it’s meat and potatoes or chateaubriand; we need to make it a special occasion for them, and it’s showtime for us.”

Set the stage with carefully curated decor, lighting, and music that align with the client’s vision and the theme or color palette of the event. Create an inviting and comfortable space that allows clients to focus on the flavors and presentation of each dish without distraction. Personalized touches, such as

custom menus and thematic place cards and table settings, can elevate the overall ambiance and leave a lasting impression. You can even welcome your clients to the tasting with a cocktail or glass of wine.

“We’re super passionate foodies and we get really into our tastings,” said Robin Selden during the tasting session. “We want our couples who come to have an experience of what it would feel like to actually be at that event.”

“That impression is over the top from an experiential standpoint,” added Jeffrey Selden. “People walk away completely blown away.”

This is also an opportunity to highlight some of your partner vendors, such as florists and rental companies.

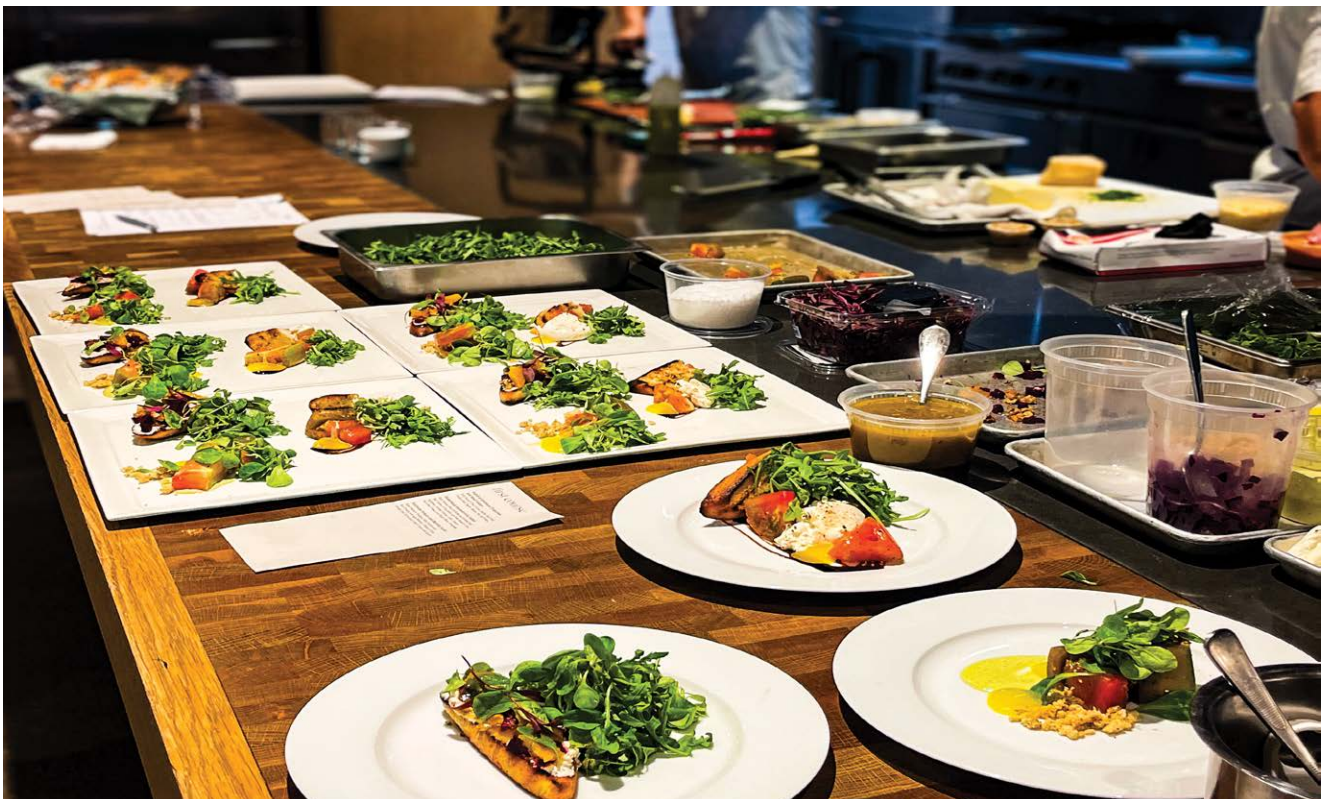
“It brings it all together,” said Haracz.

You should also ensure you have the best staff on hand during your tastings to deliver the best service and experience. Better yet, have the kitchen staff and servers who will be working the event there to ensure seamless execution.

Marcy's *Musts* for Standing Out at a Tasting

1. **Showcase your creativity with interactive service.**
2. **Tastings can help to show off your hospitable staff.**
3. **You can be an active participant, but don't be defensive.**
 - a. Perspective clients can recognize your technique and talent, even without loving everything they have tried.
4. **Create special details that will surprise and delight clients:**
 - a. Place cards
 - b. Monogrammed napkins
 - c. Floral arrangements
 - d. Live music
 - e. Top wait staff
 - f. Branded straws
 - g. A welcome drink
5. **Ambiance: hotel tastings will have a different vibe than an off-premise tasting. Work with your surroundings and your client.**
6. **Give a sweet treat for guests to take away or**
 - a mini cooking kit they can use in perpetuity and always think of you.
7. **Follow up with a thank you note and share your excitement with the planner and clients about the event.**
8. **Ask the planner for honest feedback following the tasting.**

Information above courtesy Marcy Blum (Marcy Blum Associates), The Old Razzle Dazzle: Tips on Reaching the Next Level of Hospitality (Catersource + The Special Event 2023)



For tastings, Blue Plate Catering composes both a show plate (presented beautifully) as well as smaller tasting size salads (plated together on a single platter) in order to safeguard against waste and uneaten food. Photo courtesy Blue Plate Catering

“That way they can see it through to the end,” Haracz said.

A sweet send off


At the conclusion of the tasting event, encourage open and honest feedback from your clients. Constructive criticism can be invaluable in refining your offerings and tailoring your services to better meet their expectations. Additionally, expressing a genuine interest in their opinions fosters a sense of collaboration and strengthens the client-caterer relationship.

“Obviously the goal is that we want them to be able to make their decision that day before they leave,” said Jeffrey Selden. “But, if you don’t love something, tell us, and we can revise it—we don’t have an ego about this.”

Also, don’t underestimate the appeal of sending them home with a gift, as this will solidify a lasting impression in their memories.

“After every tasting we send our clients out with custom shopping bags and custom water,” said Robin Selden. “It’s no big deal, it’s just whatever we have that we are making that week, but people just love free things; and when they’re packaged pretty it’s this great little moment that they have left with them.”

Curating a tasting event that resonates with clients requires a lot of thought and creativity, but by doing this you can create an experience that not only showcases your skills but also leaves a lasting impression.

“Anything you do at a tasting, it’s not just to get the gig,” said Blum, “it’s to build long-term relationships.” 



Top: Dessert Station tasting setup; Above: A late night treat tasting. Photos courtesy Blue Plate Catering



Peachy Keen

Subtly sensual, Peach Fuzz (the 2024

Pantone Color of the Year) is a heartfelt hue bringing a feeling of kindness and tenderness, communicating a message of caring and sharing, community and collaboration. An appealing peach hue softly nestled between pink and orange, Peach Fuzz inspires belonging, recalibration, and an opportunity for nurturing, conjuring up an air of calm. The color offers us a space to flourish from, a space to be, feel, and heal.

“In seeking a hue that echoes our innate yearning for closeness and connection, we chose a color radiant with warmth and modern elegance. A shade that resonates with compassion, offers a tactile embrace,

and effortlessly bridges the youthful with the timeless,” says Leatrice Eiseman, Executive Director, Pantone Color Institute™.

Peach Fuzz is a nurturing peach tone that inspires us to instinctively want to reach out and touch. Conveying a message of tactility that comes through in sueded, velvety, quilted, and furry textures, luxuriously soothing and soft to the touch, Peach Fuzz is an enveloping peach hue that awakens our senses to the comforting presence of tactility and cocooned warmth.

Here is some inspiration to help you incorporate Peach Fuzz into your next event. —Amber Kispert



French macarons | D'Amico Catering | Photo courtesy Bellagala Photography



Cake | Lynne Reznick Photography | Photo courtesy of Lynne Reznick Photography



Strawberry Cheesecake Cones | D'Amico Catering



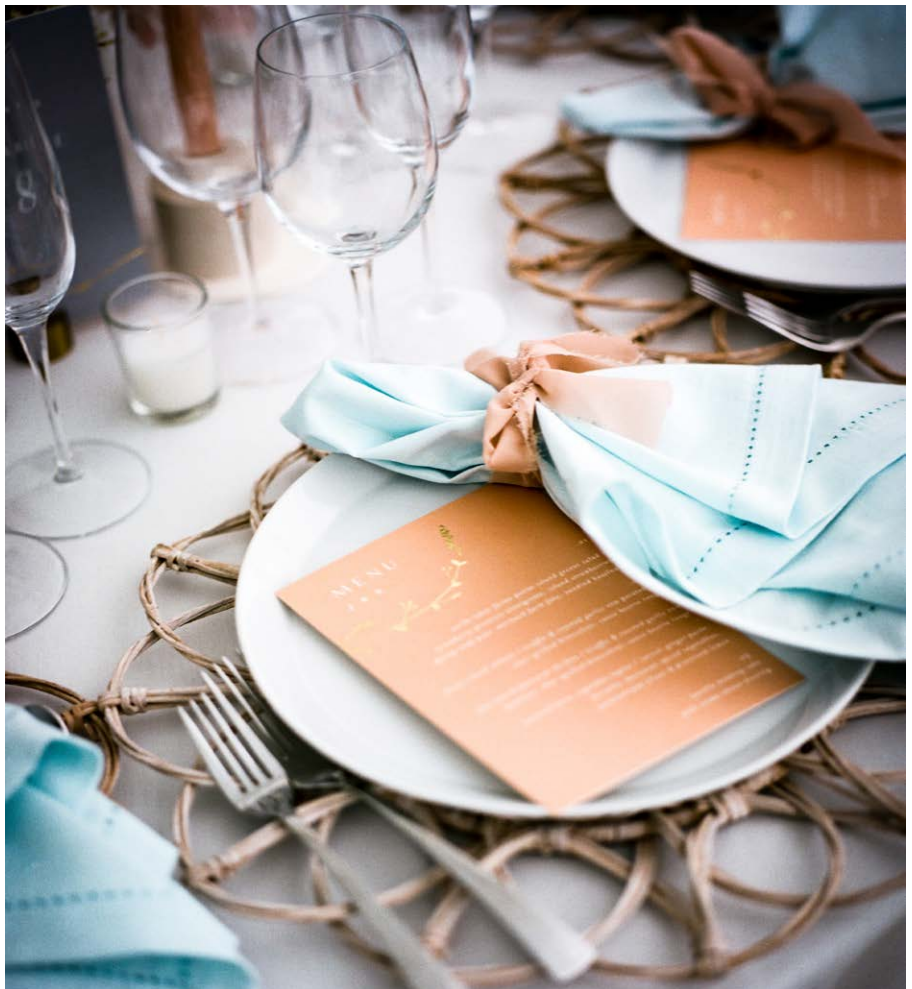
courtesy Lynne Reznick Photography



atering | Photo courtesy Bellagala Photography



Bar display | Bella Notte | Photo courtesy Lisa Boggs Photography



Menu | Timeless Event Planning | Photo courtesy Christine Sargologos



Placecard display | Karena Dixon Photography | Photo courtesy Karena Dixon Photography



Individual charcuterie plates | Wildy Connected Photography | Photo courtesy Wildy Connected Photography



Bar | Lynne Reznick Photography | Photo courtesy Lynne Reznick Photography



ected Photography |
hy



Tomato, Red Pepper, Shallot, and Jalapeño chilled soup (with optional vodka) | D'Amico Catering | Photo courtesy Bellagala Photography



courtesy Lynne Reznick Photography



Stemware and candles | House of Joy | Photo courtesy M. Eilert Photography

Tips for Incorporating Peach Fuzz

Kathleen Schaffer (SCHAFFER) shares several ways to showcase a signature color, such as Peach Fuzz, in the food and beverage of your event.

- One of the easiest ways to bring Peach Fuzz into your event is through peach cocktails, such as bellinis or mojitos.
- The best way to add color to food and drinks is through nature. Identify a color and flavor profile based on it occurring naturally and then create cocktails and hors d'oeuvres that highlight a specific color. For example:
 - **Make Peach Fuzz Colored-Pasta:** You can create this color using tomato juice, saffron, carrot, semolina flour, and beet juice. If you start with white flour and add egg yolks, your color will be yellow as a base. You need to add pink tones to bring the peach color forward. Adding beet juice diluted with water will impart a fuchsia hue, but beets also have blue undertones that need to be balanced with orange tones to neutralize it. Carrot juice or dehydrated carrot powder should do the trick.
 - **Make a Peach Fuzz-Colored Sauce:** Make a creamy tomato broth for under the pasta, and add clear tomato water, beet and carrot juice, and soy lecithin mixture. Siphon to create a perfect foam; the aeration of the foam will lighten the color to the correct Peach Fuzz tone.
- Match a desired color through a tool that outlines the exact powered, all-natural food coloring needed to achieve any Pantone shade.



Watermelon-fennel shrub | Chowgirls Catering



Papaya, grapefruit, coconut, lemongrass, Photo courtesy Bellagala Photography



ing | Photo courtesy Sage E Imagery



mint, and cilantro | D'Amico Catering |











Tablesetting | LOLA Event Productions | Photo courtesy Amanda Megan Miller Photography

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AS SEEN IN... AUSTIN

By Amber Kispert

It was a Texas-sized feast for the senses in February when caterers and event planners came together in Austin, TX for Catersource + The Special Event (turn to page 44 for more on the event). Between culinary demonstrations, samples, and a [cooking competition](#), there was no shortage of tantalizing tastes. Here's a look! 



Chef Alicia Smith (Cru Catering) was awarded the people's choice prize for her dish: caramelized onion, fennel, artichoke, and potato medley served with seared scallops, crispy prosciutto topped with an orange and chocolate sauce, brûléed orange, and parmesan snow. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



Chef Joshua House's (The JKD Diced) dish: harissa bone broth with a little bit of chocolate, a diced artichoke, prosciutto, parmesan, vinegar, smoked paprika asparagus, a strip of steak with a brown butter sauce. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



The 2024 Diced competition winning dish came from Chef Nettie Frank with her parmesan fondue served alongside crêpes, sautéed vegetables, and steak. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



Chef Joseph Pina's (Sodexo) finished Diced dish: steak tacos with a champagne vinegar red cabbage slaw, artichoke pesto, prosciutto garnish, and mole sauce. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



Chefs Joshua House (The JKD Catering & Events) presented a plating during Art of Catering F to Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



(Group) finished
demi-glacé finished
dish comprised of
on and champagne
agus, served alongside
er sear. Photo courtesy
C Productions, Inc./



Chef Jean Claude Etienne's (Rosendale Events) finished
dish for the DICED competition: leeks and cauliflower
purée served with sautéed mushrooms, seasoned and
seared strip steak, julienned crispy prosciutto topped
with a chocolate sauce comprised of heavy cream,
smoked paprika, and cayenne pepper. Photo courtesy
Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./
SpotMyPhotos



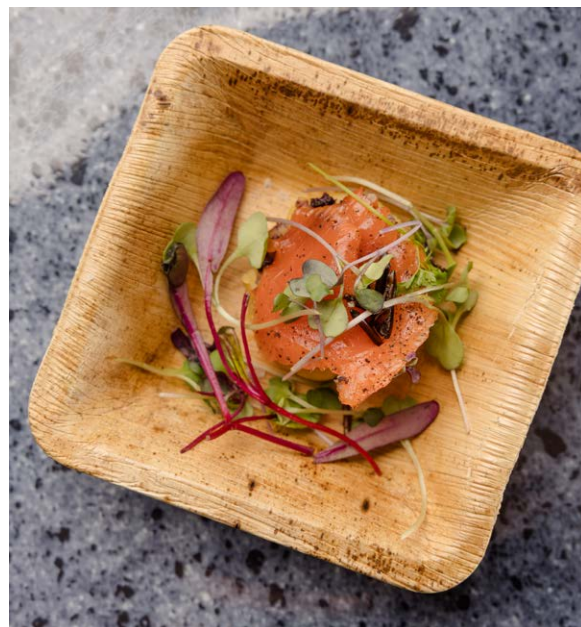
Chef Jeremy Langemann (Bingemans Catering) prepared an
aphrodisiac tasting plate for his DICED entry: a celery heart
salad with champagne vinaigrette and goat cheese, prosciutto
wrapped artichoke, raw beef tataki served with a chocolate
garnish on the side. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/
AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



(Group) and Phuoc Vo (CBK
session on how to elevate
ood (held the two days prior
event). Photo courtesy Dana
Productions, Inc.



During Art of Catering Food, Chef Jeremy Langemann sampled a maple-cured sweetgrass smoked salmon served over a corn cake
and accompanied by a saskatoon berry spread during his session *It's All About the Bannock, Or Is It?*, which explored the world of
indigenous cuisine. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions





(Top) Who says barbecue can't be elegant? Duce Raymond showcased a beautiful barbecue display during his session, *Barbecue Elevated! Taking Barbecue to the Next Level*, at Catersource + The Special Event. (Above) Chefs Joanne Purnell (Good Gracious! Events) and Karen O'Connor (Daniel et Daniel Catering and Evens) demonstrated how to elevate hors d'oeuvres during their session on the culinary stage. Shown: Buttermilk Fried Chicken on a Cheddar Biscuit. Photos courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



This year's DICED competition (held on February 14th) challenged chefs to prepare a dish that a couple could enjoy together on Valentine's Day: breakfast in bed, charcuterie for two; anything goes as long as it can be enjoyed by two people. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



Chef Phuoc Vo utilized liquid nitrogen to create beautiful bites during his session, *Barbecue Elevated! Taking Barbecue to the Next Level*, at Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



Ron Ben-Israel demonstrated how to create beautiful bites during his session, *Barbecue Elevated! Taking Barbecue to the Next Level*, at Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc./SpotMyPhotos



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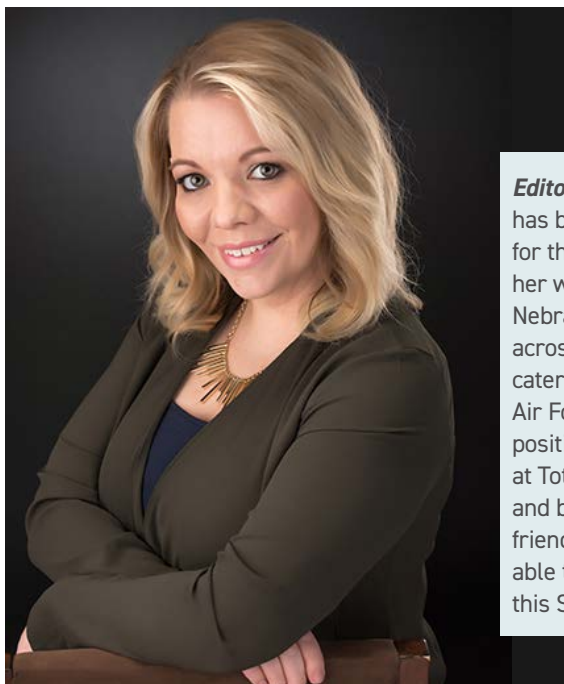
One of the finished dishes that Chefs Joshua House (The
JDK Group) and Phuoc Vo (CBK Catering & Events)
presented during their Art of Catering Food session,
We All Eat With Our Eyes First. Photo courtesy Dana
Gibbons Photography/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



ow to craft beautiful, life-like sugar flowers during this year's Art of Catering Food. Photo
raphy/AGNYC Productions, Inc.



Austin-based (and James Beard finalist) Chef Tavel
Bristol-Joseph delivered the keynote during Art of
Catering Food where he offered a chicken curry sample
for guests. Photo courtesy Dana Gibbons Photography/
AGNYC Productions, Inc.



Editor's note: Melissa Tibben has been an indelible champion for the catering industry. From her work at Attitude on Food in Nebraska, to her brave move across country to become the catering manager at MacDill Air Force Base, to her current position as pay success manager at Total Party Planner, she uplifts and brightens our world. Dear friend, I'm delighted you were able to provide the *Digestif* for this Spring issue. —KS

Off-Premise Inspiration Days

In the fast-paced world of the catering and events industry, staying ahead of trends and continually innovating is not just beneficial—it's essential. One of the most effective ways to spark creativity and gather fresh ideas is by scheduling off-premise inspiration days. These dedicated days aim to bring together team members from all departments outside the confines of their usual working environment, immersing them in spaces that encourage free thought, creativity, and collaboration.

The value

Off-premise inspiration days are more than just a break from the office; they are a strategic tool for fostering innovation and teambuilding. By moving your team to a new, inspiring environment, you can break down the hierarchical and departmental barriers that often exist within the workplace. This encourages a free exchange of ideas, where an idea for your next best hors d'oeuvres might just come from someone outside of the culinary department.

The location

Select a location outside of your normal working environment. You want a location that stimulates the senses and invites creative thinking. Consider spaces like farmer's markets, art galleries, botanical gardens, historic neighborhoods, or even an international market. The goal is to find a place to invite conversation and creativity, a place that is vastly different from your everyday work life.

The structure

While the idea behind these off-premise inspiration days is to spark creativity, free thinking, and collaboration, you need to have some structure. Begin with a brief meeting to set the day's objectives, loose expectations, and open-mindedness. Reconvene periodically to share ideas and inspiration that has emerged. Include a shared meal at a park or unique local restaurant, offering a relaxed setting for discussing morning inspirations.

The people

Encourage participation from all departments. Inclusivity is what makes these days so special. This approach acknowledges that inspiration and creativity are not confined to specific roles or departments, allowing everyone to feel heard and appreciated.

The schedule

To truly benefit from the creative boost that off-premise inspiration days can offer, make them a regular part of your company culture. Quarterly or bi-annual events can provide a consistent source of fresh ideas and keep your team motivated and engaged. Additionally, regularly scheduled inspiration days demonstrate your commitment to innovation and employee development.

By carefully selecting inspiring locations, structuring the day to encourage idea generation, and involving team members from all departments, you can unlock a wealth of creative potential that will drive your business forward. Remember, the best ideas often come from the most unexpected places, and by stepping out of the office and into an inspiring environment, you're taking a significant step towards ensuring your company's continued success and growth. **CS**



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