

SUMMER 2023

catersource®

Orlando Gerves Up the Trends



The Life of Luxury {20}

Pricing Theory and Practice for Caterers {54}

CS+TSE Puts a Spotlight on Top Event Trends {68}

EDUCATION, NEWS, PRODUCTS & IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL CATERERS

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VOLUME 21, NUMBER 2



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Top catering and food trends seen during Catersource + The Special Event and Art of Catering Food



Behind the Cover

Phuoc Vo (CBK Catering & Events) took the top prize (both judge's choice and audience's choice) during the DICED competition (*Battle of the Burgers*), held as part of this year's Catersource + The Special Event. Vo's Latin-influenced smashed burger featured sirloin, panko panade, cucumber and strawberry slaw, salsa camañanga, spicy mayo, and a cheese skirt served on a King's Hawaiian (a Culinary Main Stage pantry sponsor) pretzel bun accompanied by tortilla chips on the side. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces

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Catersource + The Special Event could not offer our attendees the unforgettable experience that we do without the support of our generous sponsors

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We could not offer our attendees the unforgettable educational experience we do without the support of our talented speakers



Addicted to the Shindig

It has been three months since we closed the books on Catersource + The Special Event 2023 and also welcomed the relaunch of Art of Catering Food in beautiful Orlando, FL. From all accounts, the week was uplifting, positive, and full of mind-opening thoughts for business building,

no matter where you position yourself in the catering and/or events industry. We have done a lot of recapping online at catersource.com and I hope you've had a chance to [check it out](#). If not, more inspiration from the show awaits you inside this issue!

But, as we are most certainly “addicted to the shindig,” we have already begun planning for 2024 and our industry week in Austin, TX February 11–15, 2024. Read more about it in Conference News, starting on page 8.

For those of you who were unable to attend our fabulous conference and tradeshow, you will want to turn to page 36 to devour senior content producer Amber Kispert's comprehensive feature on the top food and catering trends seen at Catersource, The Special Event, and Art of Catering Food. From robots to relish, vegetables to vessels—you may think you know it all, but this feature will show you the trends as they traded at the show.

While this piece may not be considered half as “sexy,” learning how to price your services within your market—and also why price isn't always the determining factor—is probably one of the most important pieces of advice you can take in 2023. Turn to page 54 for those words of wisdom from the one and only Carl Sacks, executive director of the Leading Caterers of America.

Next, while we may not be living in the lap of luxury, we certainly wouldn't mind bagging a few of those clients who do. Our keynote, Marcy Blum, laid that delicate dance out for show attendees this past March, and we go into even greater detail with a few more voices who work with the crème de la crème starting on page 20.

Finally, for any Red Hot Chili Pepper fans, I hope you recognized that the title of this note is part of the lead line from their two-decades-old song, *Can't Stop*. For the casual listener, the song lyrics are hard to decipher, or are there to mainly fill in a rhythm. But listen closely (says the wordsmith writing this piece): the overarching theme is that you must live your life with passion, purpose, and individuality. Because, as Anthony Kiedis sings as the song closes, “This life is more than just a read-through.”

Everywhere you can look, there is beauty and inspiration to be found. Thank goodness that our profession is one that embraces passion, talent, and creativity in a way that also allows us to be rewarded for our efforts. Enjoy this summer issue, and may you find inspiration within!

Kathleen Stoehr, Director of Community & Content Strategy

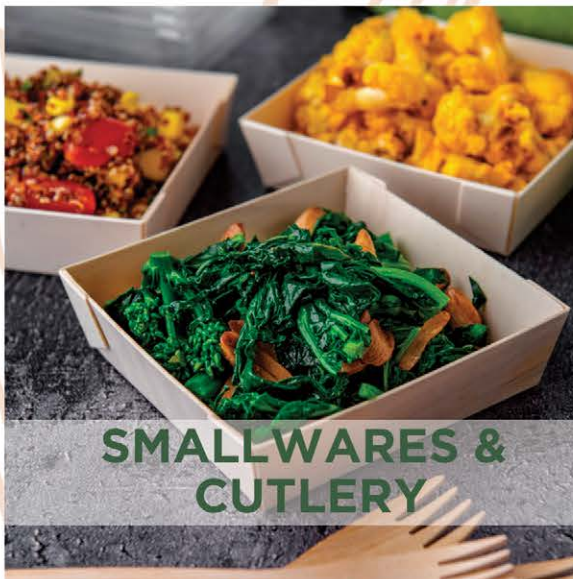


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Summer 2023 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** discusses the dangers of being “whelming” in service and with your employees



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** examines how AI can assist in sales



Catering consultant **Carl Sacks** looks at pricing theory and how to put it into practice



Third-generation business owner **Kathryn Albarado** reflects on her time with a generational catering business

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

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<https://informaconnect.com/art-of-catering-food/>

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Conference updates

Catersource + The Special Event: Next stop — Austin, TX!

The team at Catersource + The Special Event is deep into planning for a week of stellar learning, networking, and opportunity next February 11–15, 2024 in Austin, TX, a walkable city with tremendous restaurants, cozy cocktail bars, inviting event venues, and accommodating hotel properties. Core team members visited the first week of May to explore the possibilities, with the help of [Visit Austin](#).

The cuisine

Establishments touting various types of barbecue are rampant in the city. Being Lockhart, TX, just 30 minutes away, is considered the epicenter of barbecue in the entirety

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of Texas, the nearby capital city of Austin benefits greatly from proximity. Tex-Mex, southern emphasis, old school, a little bit of New Orleans, and a whole lot of deep-fried goodness categorize much of the offerings (and there are many) in the capital city of Austin.

Probably the most famous of the barbecues is [Franklin](#), which started in Aaron and Stacy Franklin's backyard, moved to a small trailer in 2009, and today has fed everyone from Jimmy Kimmel to President Barack Obama. Aaron Franklin won a James Beard Award for Best Chef in 2015 and was inducted into the American Royal Barbecue Hall of Fame in 2020.

Most recently, Aaron Franklin and partner Chef Tyson Cole opened [Loro](#), an Asian smokehouse featuring grilled and smoked meats with Southeast Asian and Japanese-inspired sauces. Keep that thought in your head, people; there may be a class at Catersource + The Special Event 2024 focusing on this very topic—how companionable Texas barbecue and Asian flavors truly are. Who will be teaching it? Stay tuned!

by Kathleen Stoehr

Near the convention center, **Moonshine Comfort & Cocktails** offers classic American comfort food in a charming setting. In the basement (Wednesday through Saturday after 5:00 p.m.) you will find **Kinfolk**: a historic cellar built in the 1850s. Now an award-winning 20-seat bar, Kinfolk features a refined list of cocktails bolstered by a unique collection of spirits. Reservations required.

At **ATX Cocina**, modern Mexican rules the menu with sharable plates highlighting masa, pequenos, and crudo, all crafted in a completely

gluten-free kitchen. Highlights include brussels sprouts with spiced agave vinaigrette, huarache, burrata y fresa, and enfrijolada with poblano ricotta.

Banger's on Rainey Street is all about the beer (over 200 types always on tap) and sausage. Sausages are made onsite, as well as house-made pickles and sauerkraut, too. All quality food, made from scratch.

Finally, at **Fixe Southern House**, order the Fixe biscuits with fruit preserves and organic Texas honey; deviled eggs with smoked trout roe; and shrimp and grits to share at the table. Add in lobster and crawfish pot pie, fried chicken, and beet salad to finish and you will leave stuffed and happy.

The venues

Beyond the Austin Convention Center, where the conference and tradeshow will take wing, the team toured a variety of potential event spaces. They included:

Austin City Limits Live at The Moody Theater on Willie Nelson Boulevard

– This is the permanent home of the acclaimed Austin PBS produced television series, *Austin City Limits*, the longest running music series in American television history and also the first mixed-occupancy building of its type in the world to be LEED certified. Three levels offer 2,700+ capacity with an outside plaza and mezzanine gallery of historical ACL music photos that dazzle.

Palmer Events Center on Barton Springs Road – With an incredible view of the downtown Austin skyline, this venue ticks all the boxes for a memorable evening event. Covered outdoor canopy space abutting Butler Park, quiet indoor spaces and covered balconies, and a large hall for activations inside. It's a stunning space, but...is the elevator haunted?

Superstition on Riverside Drive – An elite multi-room nightclub channels



Bangers and mash with kale salad topped with pickled onions at Banger's. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



Lobster and crawfish pot pie with mushrooms and sweet corn bechamel at Fixe Southern House. Photo courtesy Fixe Southern House



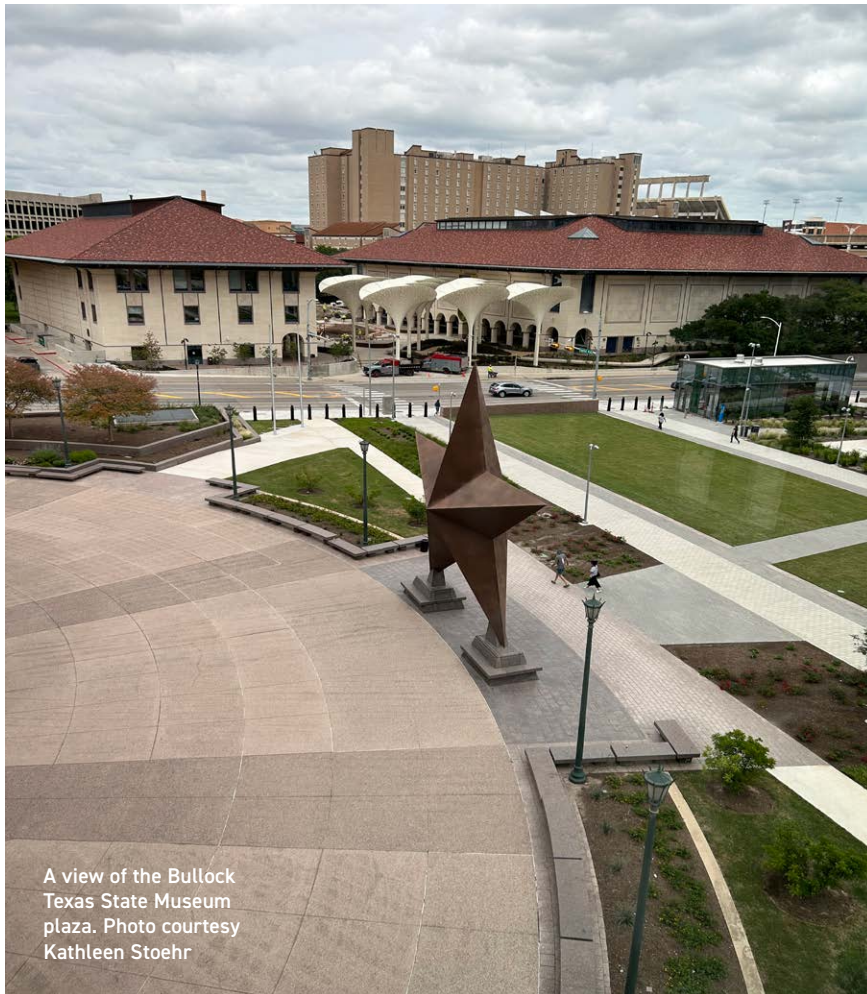
Crispy calamari with arugula salad and remoulade at Moonshine. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



(Above top) Chef Aaron Franklin. Photo courtesy Wyatt McSpadden



A typical Franklin BBQ spread. Photo courtesy Wyatt McSpadden



A view of the Bullock Texas State Museum plaza. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



The walk up bar outside of Micheladas Café y Cantina. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr

the energy of the 1970s, with 12,000 square feet of elevated space, a cocktail lounge, the “Gold Room,” and patio area. It’s a stunner of a venue, and very new to the Austin area.

Banger’s Austin on Rainey Street – Indoor, outdoor, and outdoor-covered options in a casual setting with a basement speakeasy as well as over 200 beers on tap always. Live fire cooking, plenty of seating, nooks for quiet conversation, and walking distance from the convention center make this a solid choice for an event.

Speakeasy on Congress Avenue – Located in the historic Kreisle Building, the old bones of this

building come to life in three levels: music lounge; bowling mezzanine; and the ballroom, the Kabaret Room, and the rooftop lounge. Apparently, another spirit haunts this establishment as well. Woooooowooo!

800 Congress on Congress Avenue – This smaller venue in downtown Austin showcases views of the Capitol, an open warehouse look with exposed brick that’s industrial, yet polished, and is A/V ready.

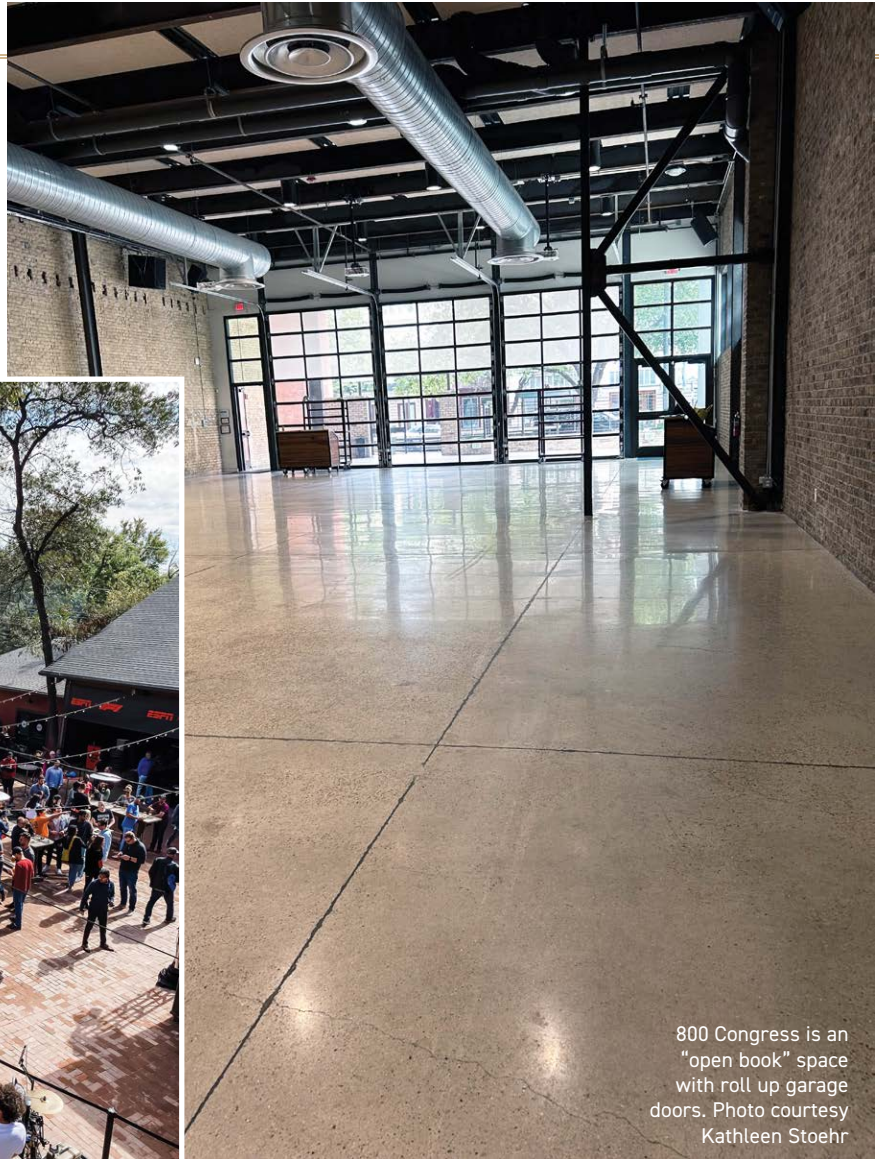
Copper Tank Event Center & Micheladas Café y Cantina on Trinity Street – A private venue in the heart of downtown within

walking distance of the convention center, Copper Tank is attached to Micheladas, with a wide variety of spaces, from rooftop patios, to walk-up street counters, a full kitchen, courtyard, and plenty of seating.

Antone’s on Fifth Street – Downstairs concert hall marries upstairs event space for an intimate venue that celebrates the blues. An adjacent record shop and entry foyer featuring an antique shoeshine stand imbue loads of charm.

Bullock Texas State Museum on Congress Avenue – For those who love the grandeur and history that museums bring to any event, the

The outdoor stage at Banger's on a sunny day in Austin, TX. Photo courtesy Visit Austin



800 Congress is an "open book" space with roll up garage doors. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



An antique shoeshine station can be rented for guests to spiff up before hitting the dancefloor. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr

Bullock is a real treat. The plaza outside plus first floor rotunda with soaring spiral staircase are already dressed up and ready for an elegant night. Additional levels overlook the rotunda to create memorable experiences.

Distribution Hall on 4th Street – This midcentury structure features a studio warehouse with infinity wall, an open-air hangar, and a gorgeous 7,000 square foot courtyard and lawn with a gnarly old pecan tree towering over it majestically. Load-bearing truss and solid concrete floors inside can accommodate just about anything you'd want to showcase at an event.

Central Library on Cesar Chavez Street – Even the Uber driver gushed about this property as he dropped off his charges. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook Lady Bird Lake, a covered patio area for arrivals is large enough for activations and pre-function space, coat check room, and green room is included in the rental.



(Above two photos) The Tradeshow during Catersource + The Special Event will have plenty of inspiration and samples February 14-15, 2024. Next year will also mark the return of the DICED competition to the Tradeshow floor. Photos courtesy WASIO Faces

The February 2024 schedule of happenings

Sunday, February 11th: After a very successful relaunch in Orlando this past March, Art of Catering Food (AOCF) will return with an all-new lineup of chefs to learn from and with a focus on innovation. Produced in conjunction with the International Caterers Association, AOCF will bring exclusive culinary training, trends, ingredients, and techniques taught by successful catering chefs. Day 1 will start with a light breakfast followed by short sessions; next up is lunch, and then we'll continue with culinary, venue, and cultural tours in the late afternoon.

Monday, February 12th: Art of Catering Food continues with its Day 2 education, tastings, and networking, and industry associations and groups will hold everything from board meetings to full day thought leadership gatherings. Venue tours for event professionals will start in the afternoon and a culinary

tour for catering professionals is also in the planning stages. As day moves to night, Catersource + The Special Event will open the doors on its Connect Live evening event, a chance for those already checked in and ready to engage and kick-off the week. It's a great evening, spirits are high, and the week is wide open with possibility for networking and interaction.

Tuesday, February 13th: Catersource + The Special Event opens, with a conference-only first day and an opening night event. Its sister media brand, MeetingsNet, also returns with conference sessions geared directly to the meeting planner audience (available to those who purchase a TSE or All Access pass).

After the conference closes for the day, groups such as International Caterers Association Educational Foundation (ICAEF) will celebrate its scholarship recipients in a private

gathering; various exhibitors will host invitation-only events; and then the evening will culminate in the Opening Night Party, with more details to follow in our Fall issue or online at <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>

Wednesday, February 14th: An Opening General Session launches a full day of activity on the exhibit hall floor (open 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) including conference sessions on the Ignite and Culinary stages. There will, as always, be hundreds of exhibitors to visit, experience, and learn from and activations to enjoy.

The annual DICED competition will move back to the tradeshow floor and bring chefs together for a fun-loving but highly competitive contest, Battle of the Burgers! Pitting six chefs against the clock (and each other) to create a winning creation, three judges will decide who will take home the \$1,500 prize and the



2024 DICED champion trophy.

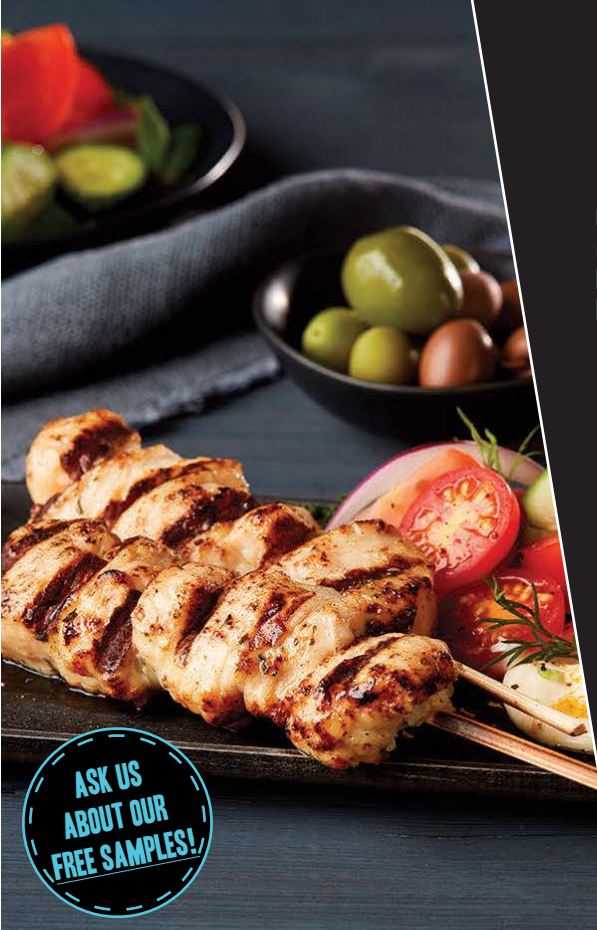
In the afternoon, additional sessions in conference rooms begin at 1:00 p.m. and end at 5:00 p.m.

Later in the evening the annual Special Event Assistance, Relief & Crisis Help (SEARCH) Foundation's Signature Event fundraiser will bring like-minded people together to raise money through auction for those in need. A spectacular charitable event, *Catersource* is a proud donor and hopes to see you there!

Thursday, February 15th: Always known to go big on its last day, *Catersource* + The Special Event will offer a 9:00 a.m. Closing General Session that will inspire you, another

full day of exhibit hall browsing and buying (10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.), more conference education, and then it's time to celebrate! You'll start the night off with the "Oscars" of the catering and events industry: An elaborate awards ceremony featuring the ACE, CATIE, Leadership, and Gala awards with pre-show cocktail reception and heartwarming awards presentation for work exceptionally well done (see below for more information on the ACE awards).

After that, join award recipients and exhibitors, sponsors, speakers, and attendees for one last industry week hurrah as we say farewell at our Closing Night Celebration.





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Pre-awards entertainment set the tone for a sophisticated evening at the ACE, CATIE, Leadership & Gala awards ceremony. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



Norm Bennett accepts the National Caterer of the Year award on behalf of his company, 24 Carrots Catering and Events. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces

All the other good stuff

Registration: Registration opens in August! Super Early Bird rates will be in effect so you can take advantage of the lowest prices available. Go to <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/> for more information.

Call for Speakers: Our call for session speakers closed in mid-June and the full educational schedule will launch mid-fall of 2023. Stay tuned as we start teasing out sessions and speakers in our Fall issue, out September 30th.

And the award goes to...

It's once again time to celebrate the best of the best! Nominations are now being accepted for the *Catersource* 2024 Achievement in Catered Events awards (ACE)! We invite you to submit your best work from the past year (see eligibility period below). Join in the excitement and the spirit of our industry as we celebrate the hard work and exceptional accomplishments of our peers. Here are the categories:

- **National Caterer of the Year**
- **International Caterer of the Year**
- **Best Off-Premise Catering,** for companies under \$2 million annual revenue
- **Best Off-Premise Catering,** for companies above \$2 million annual revenue
- **Best On-Premise Catering,** for companies under \$2 million annual revenue
- **Best On-Premise Catering,** for companies above \$2 million annual revenue
- **Catered Social Event of the Year**
- **Catered Fundraising Event of the Year**
- **Catered Wedding of the Year**
- **Catered Micro Event of the Year**
- **Product or Technological Innovation of the Year**
- **Sustainability in Catering**

To submit an entry to this year's ACE awards and see the full list of categories, please visit our awards portal at <https://ace-gala.awardsplatform.com/>

Important Dates

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

Want to learn more about the categories for the *Special Events* Gala awards? Turn to page 14 in our sister publication, *Special Events* magazine, and read all about them! 

Call to Arms!

If you would like to be a part of the planning committee for any of CS+TSE's evening Showcasing Events, a Call to Arms will be held soon. You can also express your interest to Show Manager, **Jesse Parziale**, at jesse.parziale@informa.com. **Watch the websites or our weekly newsletters for more information.**

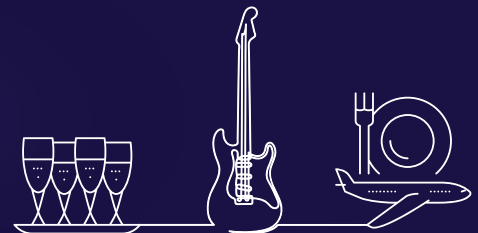
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Level Up This Season: Growing Beyond Traditional Food Presentation

With each season comes new trends. But, while most caterers tend to focus on creating complex flavor profiles, featuring farm-fresh ingredients or harvesting the next best trendy cocktails, if those aren't presented in a wow-worthy way, they'll wilt away and lose their intended flair.

The caterers who win bids in today's competitive landscape are the ones who not only cultivate delicious cuisine, but those who go further with impressive display and presentation; and the inspiration we're sharing from CATIE awards finalists showcases just that.

These Best Action Station finalists truly went above and beyond traditional food presentation to grow their businesses, their authority, and their creativity! Today, we're sharing tips so you can re-create or use this as inspiration to grow.

"Grow" by Catering by Design | Winner

The concept for this station was to create a greenhouse-inspired area that offered more of a "dinner and a show" type of experience rather than just a traditional station.

How it worked

The team created playful seed packets that were labeled to correspond with one of the three small plate options being offered at the station. Guests would choose the packet they wanted to taste and hand it off to the "gardener," aka

the station attendant. The gardener would then "plant and water" the seeds to sprout up a savory dish.

How it sprouted up was perhaps the most surprising bit of all of this: a hand from a server seated below the table would pop up with the dish ready to serve. Talk about wow factor!

Design considerations

The most difficult part of the illusion was setting up a space that was comfortable and kept the mystery alive.

They did this by creating a station that was tall enough to fit two servers underneath, seated on a cushioned bench. In front of the bench were the pots with edible dirt and tasty toppings that would sprout out of pots atop the table.



(Top, from left to right)

Grow: The concept for this station was to create a greenhouse-inspired area that offered more of a "dinner and a show" type of experience. Photo courtesy Frances Photography

The team created playful seed packets that were labeled to correspond with one of the three small plate options being offered at the station. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Catering by Design

After selecting which "seed packet" they wanted to taste, guests then handed it off to the "gardener," aka the station attendant. The gardener would then "plant and water" the seeds to sprout up a savory dish. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Catering by Design

Interactive Salad Wall: Contemporary Catering wanted to ditch the boring plated salads for an event. So, after some brainstorming, they took the traditional "champagne wall" concept and applied it to tasty, fresh salads! Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Contemporary Catering

Then, the wall behind the station allowed for the passing of trays underneath, directly to the servers seated below, to keep alive the illusion of the pots sprouting the dishes!

Tips for Implementation

While it may seem daunting to create interactive displays like this, make it easier on yourself by reusing materials! Catering by Design used a brick wall they had fabricated for a former event to make execution simpler.

Ask yourself what you have in-house that you can pair together creatively for a fun, interactive design!

"Interactive Salad Wall" by Contemporary Catering | Finalist

Contemporary Catering wanted to ditch the boring plated salads for an event. After some brainstorming, they took the traditional "champagne wall" concept and applied it to tasty, fresh salads!

How it worked

The team offered three displayed salads, each of which had its own mini-shelf on the display wall. There were 100 mini shelves on two panels. So, for larger events, they would have their team on guard to replace each salad as it's taken away. This also helps so salads don't sit and wilt.

Design considerations

While building the wall, the team considered a few key factors:

- Durability and function
- Meeting the design vision
- Ease of construction
- Ease of transportation

So, they tested. The design team gave their sketches to the warehouse team, who went to work to build a 16' x 8' structure with three sections: two for displaying food and one for décor to spice up the visual.

The warehouse team experimented a bit and finally developed a design that would be durable and



The year is 2142. The world is in shambles. Inside an abandoned warehouse, a community of 250 survivors ration what they can to live another day. Volunteer chefs scavenge anything they can find. To ensure riot doesn't break out, inhabitants must reach their hand through the hedge wall to receive their ration. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Footer's Catering

functional, aesthetically pleasing, and easy to transport to various events in the future.

Tips for implementation

As we mentioned, reusing previously fabricated displays is the way to go. When designing this wall, the Contemporary Catering team also created a user manual of sorts that could be referenced for future events. This way, no matter who was on the setup team or event team, they could easily set up and tear down, even if they'd never seen the wall before.

As you cultivate your display ideas, make sure you're thinking of creating manuals, guides, and standard operating procedures for how to use, set up, and tear down for future events!

"Post-Apocalyptic Ration Wall" by Footer's Catering

If we live through an apocalypse, we hope there are ration walls like the

one Footer's Catering created for this epic futuristic event.

How it worked

With the year 2142 as inspiration, the team truly got into character—food rations, post-apocalyptic scenes, flickering lights, and fog décor, the whole nine yards. They used a cocktail wall they had in inventory and reimagined it for guests to put their hands behind the wall to snag their rations.

Design considerations

They didn't want to go out and buy a ton of supplies for this, so the designers literally scavenged the warehouse to see what they could use to build the display. See a theme here? The team gathered empty kegs, old phones, VCRs, empty crates, and more to add to the display wall. Then, they created street signage and neon light bars to direct guests on how to stick their hands into the

display to get their gourmet ramen or gigante bean salad!

Tips for implementation

The team did a better job than they thought, which was great for the theme, but not so great for guests in the beginning. Guests were a little afraid to reach their hands through to get their eats!

So, lesson learned—position a staff member at this style of display to help guests understand how to interact and get their delicious food. The simpler you make it for attendees, the more fun they'll have! 

Catering by Design, Contemporary Catering, and Footer's Catering

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

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THE LIFE OF LUXURY





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Working with luxury clients is “moonshot thinking”

BY AMBER KISPERT

For many, luxury is aspirational: being able to travel to luxurious places, dine at the finest restaurants, and generally have your needs and wants met in every scenario.

For event planners and caterers, luxury is about exclusivity, out-of-the-box thinking, and glamour.

“It’s moonshot thinking—aiming to achieve something that is generally believed to be impossible,” said Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events) during *Luxury is a State of Mind* (presented during Catersource + The Special Event 2022).

Attracting luxury clients (i.e., Fortune 500 companies, celebrities, tech executives, and politicians) is also aspirational to many in the events industry.

“Entering the luxury market is an excellent way to elevate your brand reputation and increase your revenue,” [according to an article from Nora Sheils for NACE](#).

But it’s not so much about “who” your client is.

“I could spin your head right now if I told you who my clients were, but I’m not going to,” Selden said, “because it’s not important to me, it’s important that those clients are telling their friends.”

If you’re hoping to break into the luxury market, it’s important to go in with your eyes open, since “high-end clients have high-end needs,” said Sheils.

(Left) Luxury means aspirational and exclusivity. Shown: An event by David Beahm. Photo courtesy Jose Villa

What is luxury?

Essentially, luxury clients are those who are willing to spend between \$100,000 and \$500,000 on an event (basic luxury) and those clients who will spend over \$500,000 on any given event (ultra luxury). Don't be mistaken though: there isn't a one-size-fits-all for luxury clients; some are flashy, while others like to fly under the radar.

"You have to do a little forensic work to figure out who they are, who's paying, and what type of luxury client they are," said Marcy Blum of Marcy Blum Associates during her Opening General Session at Catersource + The Special Event 2023.

When discussing luxury events, you should look at them through the lens of exclusivity. "They have what you can't," said David Beahm (David Beahm Experiences) during *Luxury is a State of Mind*. "Show them that you can give them something that they can't have anywhere else. A flower is a flower until you can say, 'I know the grower who lives in Holland. His name is Steve and has worked for 20



This 50th birthday from Marcia Selden Catering & Events featured a ceiling floral installation with custom lighting, as well as other custom details such as placecards custom painted for each guest and an over-the-top floral tablescape with custom monogrammed napkins. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events

years to get this flower this color and I'm going to put it in your bridal bouquet."

"These are people that go to a lot of fancy events, and they see a lot of things," said Sarah Hall (Joel's Catering), continuing on the topic of exclusivity, during *How to Break into the Luxury Wedding Market* (presented during Catersource + The Special Event 2023). "They want something that is unique to them and memorable for them. They want to create an experience for their friends. They absolutely want to show off their level of success, but they have a harder time admitting it."

"If their friend had that at their party last week or last year, it better not show up at their party," Selden said. "That's not luxurious for their guests to have seen it already."

At the end of the day, luxury comes down to the level of service that is provided.

"They want high end, top professionals," Blum said.

Speaking their language

When working with luxury clients, it's important to illustrate that you understand their world (where they travel, where they eat, what circles they run in), so make sure that you are reading the latest luxury magazines and staying abreast of current luxury trends.

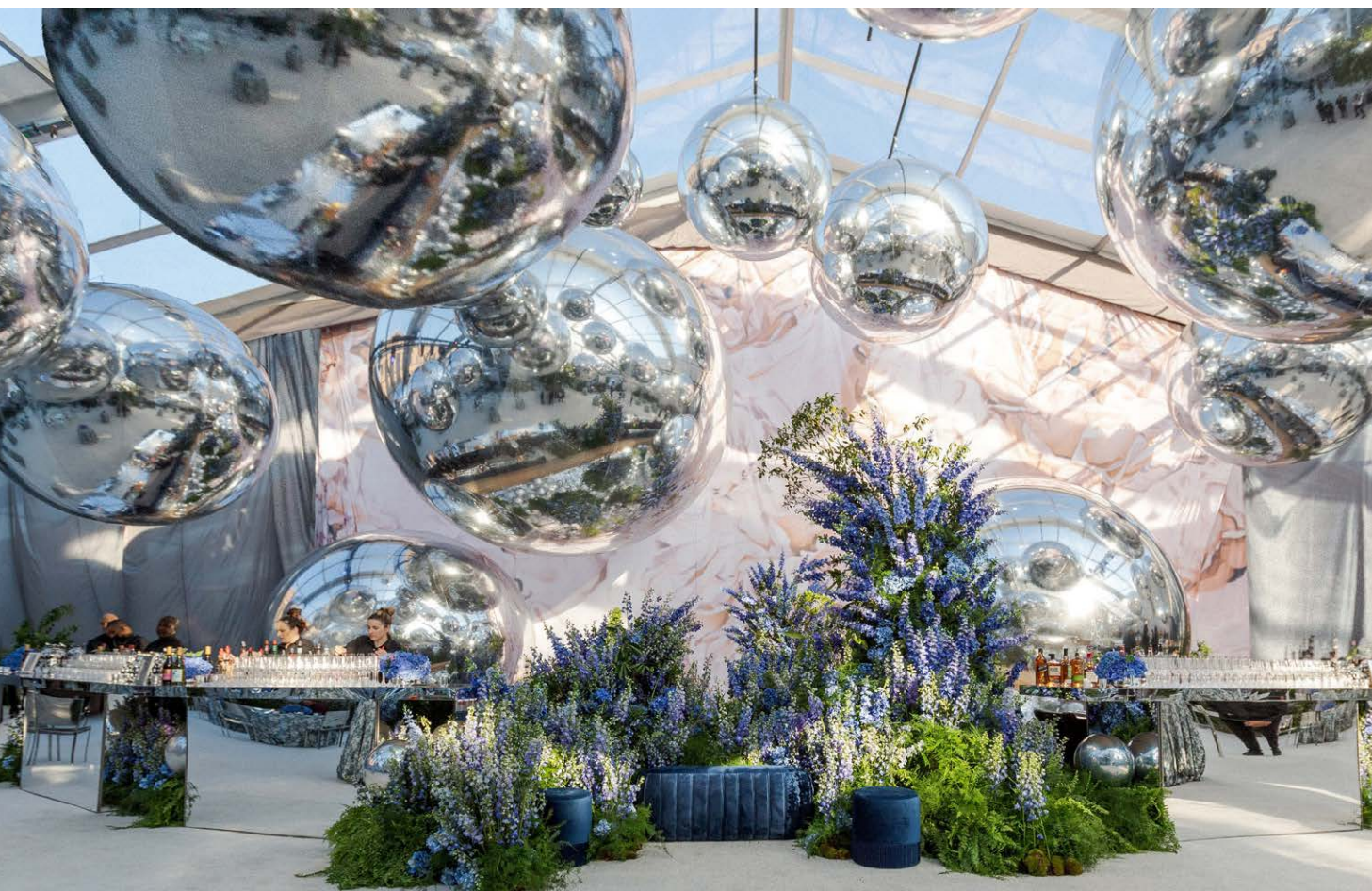
Additionally, luxury clients are also looking for those they can relate to.

"In our industry today, and especially with high network luxury clients, it's not enough anymore to be interested in our clients, you have to be interesting to them," said Paulina

Marcia Selden Catering & Events designed a custom floral installation for escort cards that mimicked the design of the event. The tablescape incorporated mismatched antique china and glassware. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



(Left) Marcia Selden Catering & Events created a custom escort card "table" for a wedding on a family's horse farm in the Hudson Valley. Photo courtesy Jonathan Young Weddings; (Right) You can take luxury to another level with the use of custom ice cubes alongside chilled champagne. Photo courtesy Michael Jurick Photography



Luxury clients are looking for concepts that they haven't seen before, like these hanging orbs that David Beahm incorporated for an event. Photo courtesy Theo Milo Photography

“You have to be authentic, especially with a luxury client. If you're inauthentic, they can smell it in the water, and they're going to take you out.” —David Beahm

Corvi (Events by Paulina) during *What Luxury Wedding Clients Really Want* (presented during Catersource + The Special Event 2022). “When you can talk to your clients they’ll think ‘This lady might know what it means to play in my sandbox. If she knows what it means to play in my sandbox, if she’s going to the same places I’m going to, maybe she gets who I am and maybe she can represent my vision for my wedding and turn it into reality.’”

Relating to luxury clients is where the concept of “code switching” comes into play. Code switching is the psychological act of making people around us feel comfortable while making ourselves feel confident around others, according to *All That Glitters is Not Always Gold* (a feature that appeared in the winter issue of *Special Events* magazine).

For Selden, she code switches when meeting with clients following a bit of cyber research.

“Is she always in her Lululemons and sneakers coming from the gym? If she is, that’s how I’m showing up to that meeting,” she said. “If she’s in her pearls and her sweater, that’s what I’m wearing.”

But be careful: there’s a fine line between being relatable and “being them.”

“They may want to relate to you, but they don’t want you to be them—it’s a very tricky dance,” Blum said. “You have to wear just enough designer stuff not to annoy them, but not too much that they think they’re paying you too much.



For a waterfront anniversary party Marcia Selden Catering & Events installed a custom floral ceiling. Photo courtesy Ricky Rodriguez

“It’s not pretention, it’s just craft. They want to understand that you are committed to your craft.”

The gatekeepers

While some caterers may already work in the luxury market (and their reputation precedes them), those who



A caprese salad from Joel’s Catering featuring heirloom tomatoes, burrata, basil, olive oil, sea salt, and pepper. Photo courtesy Denny Culbert



(Right) The plated salad course during A Love at First Rose Wedding featured arugula, frisée, Manchego cheese, dried apricot, dried fig, Pink Lady apple, toasted almond, and white balsamic vinaigrette. Photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events

(Bottom right) Colette's Catering & Events composed an hors d'oeuvres platter (featuring lobster rolls, chilled corn bisque, Hamachi Tartare, Tomato + Burrata, and Scallop Tartare) for the couple (Joelle Fletcher and Jordan Rodgers of ABC's *The Bachelorette*) during A Love at First Rose Wedding. Photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events



are hoping to break into the market may need to look to luxury event planners and luxury event venues for referrals. According to Hall, roughly 50% of luxury business will be through referrals, which is why collaboration is so essential when working with luxury clients.

"We are your friends, not your enemy," Blum said. "The only way forward is for all of us to figure out how to all work together."

Consider engaging with the planner (or venue manager) from the very beginning: host a planner-only tasting to encourage referrals, discuss your menu proposals with the planner up front, listen to their ideas, and most importantly follow up after the event (possibly even with a gift) to see what worked and what didn't.

"You are impressing the planner first and foremost because we are the gatekeepers," Blum said. "We are able to give [the caterer] clues and tricks and insight they wouldn't get otherwise; I can upsell things so much easier to a client because I've basically been living with them."



Luxury Locales

New research has discovered the top 10 most luxury obsessed areas in the United States

Customized jewelry experts Glamira analyzed Google Trends data to discover the level of interest in each area for multiple search terms including 'luxury vacation', 'luxury jewelry' and 'luxury hotels'.

1. Washington D.C.
2. New York
3. Florida
4. New Jersey
5. Connecticut
6. Georgia
7. Virginia
8. California
9. Maryland
10. Massachusetts

A spokesperson from Glamira commented on the findings: "There are various ways to experience luxury, whether that be heading on a vacation to stay in a five-star resort or perhaps purchasing high quality jewelry that will last a lifetime. It's no doubt that Americans desire a taste of a lavish lifestyle, but one thing for certain is that the East coast has a particularly keen interest in luxury with nine of the areas in the ranking belonging to this region. However, with one of the

areas in the top 10 being on the West coast, it will be interesting to see if any other nearby areas follow suit and develop a luxury obsession."

In a similar study, Wisevoter has analyzed Google Trends data to determine the most boujee states in the US. These states have a higher-than-average interest in luxury-related terms such as high-end fashion, luxury cars, and upscale travel destinations. This data suggests that residents of these states are more likely to indulge in luxury goods and experiences, making them a prime target market for luxury brands and businesses. Here is the ranking of the top 10 states looking to indulge in a luxury lifestyle in 2023.

1. New York
2. Oregon
3. Connecticut
4. West Virginia
5. Alabama
6. Maryland
7. Alaska
8. Minnesota
9. Florida
10. South Carolina

The above information is courtesy of:
 • Wisevoter
 • Glamira



Joelle Fletcher and Jordan Rodgers of ABC's *The Bachelorette* held their wedding at the Sunstone Winery. Photo courtesy Valorie Darling



(Left, from top to bottom) Joelle Fletcher and Jordan Rodgers of ABC's *The Bachelorette* had only one request for Colette's Catering & Events: beautifully plated and photo-ready food with innovative signature cocktails. Shown: Moscow Mule and Passionfruit Margarita. Photo courtesy Valorie Darling

Colette's Catering & Events received this year's Best Off-Premise ACE award for their event A Love at First Rose Wedding, which celebrated the wedding of Joelle Fletcher and Jordan Rodgers of ABC's *The Bachelorette*. Photo courtesy Valorie Darling

Beautiful blooms and luxurious crystal and china adorned the tables during A Love at First Rose Wedding. Photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events

(Bottom) Colette's Catering & Events incorporated an interactive Burrata Bar into their A Love at First Rose Wedding (featuring imported burrata cheese, fresh sliced-to-order prosciutto, house made focaccia, grissini, heirloom tomatoes, and a beautiful assortment of fresh jams). Burrata has been gaining popularity over the last year or so, making this a trendsetting moment for the event and a wow factor for the couple. Photo courtesy Valorie Darling

Additionally, make sure to maintain that respectful relationship throughout the planning process, because it's the planner or the venue who will bring more luxury business your way in the future.

"We've all done enough events to know that things can sometimes get a little dicey," Hall said, "but that couple is going to come and go, this planner and that venue manager is who I really need to partner with. They don't become our best friend then our adversary; they're always our best friend."

Setting yourself up for success

Working with luxury clients can be challenging, so it's important that you have your business set up to succeed in this market.

"When it comes to luxury clients, they're going to be fussy, they're

What's the Buzz?

Here are a few buzzwords to keep in mind when working with (or promoting to) luxury clients:

- Personalized
- Customized
- Cutting edge
- Thoughtful
- Innovative
- Artisanal
- Signature
- Prestigious
- Enthusiastic
- Craftmanship

Information above courtesy Marcy Blum, *The Old Razzle Dazzle: Tips on Reaching the Next Level of Hospitality* (Catersource + The Special Event 2023)



Sunstone Winery is modeled after a French villa and features both a lavender-filled courtyard & wine caves. Photo courtesy Valorie Darling



Char-grilled oysters from Joel's Catering (oysters brushed with melted butter, parmesan, garlic, and parsley), which are passed on an interactive concession tray. Photo courtesy Denny Culbert

going to change their mind, they're going to say, 'I forgot,'" Corvi said. "They need to know that they can trust you."

Proposals that pop

The first way to illustrate to a luxury client that you are serious, and you are up to the challenge of catering their event, is to present a professional, thorough, beautiful (and hand delivered) proposal.

"It has to look as important as the money they are looking to spend is," Blum said. "Share all kinds of menus so people get a sense of your range and diversity."

Additionally, do a little bit of research into who you'll be pitching to: is it the couple, the parents, or is it their assistant (which is most often the case). Also, never push back when a luxury client challenges something that you are proposing.

"They didn't become rich because other people argued with them," Blum said.

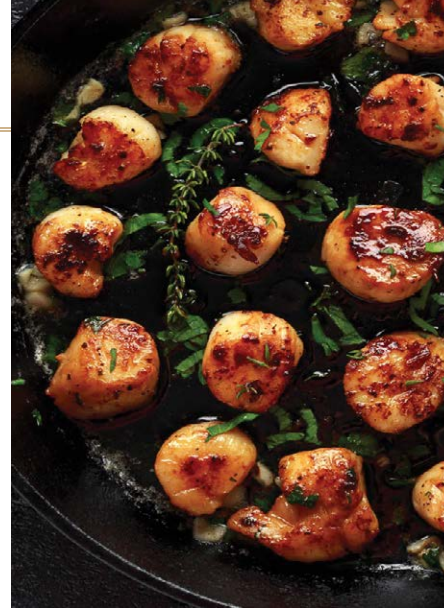
Make it a moment

Obviously, luxury clients are looking for you to offer moments that surprise, delight, and excite them.

"You have to be a memory maker," Selden said.

In catering, luxury clients want opulently served cuisines that are made from the highest quality ingredients, presented beautifully, and personal to them (95% of luxury couples said that a vendor's ability to incorporate their personal style and taste contributes to their decision, Hall said).

Consider what Colette's Catering & Events did recently for the wedding of Joelle Fletcher and Jordan Rodgers from ABC's *The Bachelorette* (this year's ACE recipient for Best Off-Premise Catering).



A fig salad from Joel's Catering featuring aged prosciutto, fresh fig, chevre, and pistachio. Photo courtesy Denny Culbert

Seared scallops from Joel's Catering (served with wilted greens and presented in an oversized cast iron pan). Photo courtesy Denny Culbert

Marcy's Musts for Standing Out at a Tasting

- Showcase your creativity with interactive service elements (they are always better in-person than in a photo)
- Tastings can help to show off your hospitable staff
- You can be an active participant, and don't be defensive
 - E.g., Perspective clients can recognize your technique and talent, even without loving everything they have tried.
- Create special details that will surprise and delight your clients
 - Place cards
 - Monogrammed napkins
 - Floral arrangements
 - Live music
 - Top wait staff
 - Branded straws
 - Welcome drink
 - Ambiance
- A hotel tasting will have a different vibe than an off-premise tasting. Work with your surroundings and your client.
- Give a sweet treat for guests to takeaway
- Follow up with a thank you note and share your excitement with the planners and clients about the event
- Ask the planner for honest feedback following the tasting

Information courtesy of Marcy Blum, *The Old Razzle Dazzle: Tips on Reaching the Next Level of Hospitality* (Catersource + The Special Event 2023)

Photo courtesy WASIO Faces





The venue is often the first thing that a luxury couple decides on. Photo courtesy Jose Villa

The initial menu proposal that they presented evolved over two years in order to further reflect the couple. Things like their favorite meals together, cherished places to visit, their shared Southern upbringing, falling in love in Los Angeles, and their values for clean eating (turn to page 80 for a look at the clean lifestyle) and sustainability became foundational pillars for the final modern American menu: an interactive Burrata Bar; filet mignon with red wine demi, Yukon gold mashed potatoes, oven-dried tomato, roasted king oyster mushrooms, sautéed spinach; and Baja Sea Bass with romesco sauce, heirloom bean ragout, hazelnut, frisée and Tinkerbell® pepper salad.

Exceed expectations

The thing that sets caterers apart when working with luxury clients are the little things: the synchronized service, the high performing staff, the surprising moments, and general service without being asked. All these things fall under the umbrella of “unreasonable hospitality,” or service that is unexpected.

“You need to show that you’re worth what you’re getting paid,” Blum said. “It’s not about ego here, it’s about money.”

“It’s the small things that make all the difference,” Corvi said. “If you can make someone’s life easier, do it.”

“The luxury experience depends on the depth that you can anticipate your clients’ needs,” Beahm said.

Branding matters

Look at your marketing and your brand if you’re hoping to break into the luxury market. Does your brand communicate luxury? Or is it more of a corporate brand? Is it worth considering a rebrand? Perhaps you need to create a luxury division of your business.

“Don’t just be a food page, show the events that you’re getting hired for,” Hall said. “If you really want to do this, you have to take it seriously.”

Be authentic

Above all, go into the luxury market knowing who you are and what you do well.

“We are known in our market as being the expensive caterer, [Beahm’s] known as being the expensive designer. I am done apologizing for being who we are,” Selden said. “If we’re not right for you, that’s okay—because I have other friends who do what you’re looking for and I will gladly send you their way—but I am not going to compromise what I know we do so right.

“If you align your company with other like brands that are luxurious, there’s something really special about that because it’s authentic and it’s not disingenuous.”

“You have to be authentic, especially with a luxury client,” Beahm said. “If you’re inauthentic, they can smell it in the water, and they’re going to take you out.”

“It doesn’t matter what you’re selling, it’s how you make them feel,” Selden said. **CS**

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*
by Meryl Snow



If I were to ask you, “What does the future of sales look like in the special events industry?” what would you say? I’ll give you a hint. It includes the word “artificial.”

I don’t know about you, but I always thought that artificial intelligence (AI) was something from the future—or a science fiction tale. Remember, in the movie *Her* (with Joaquin Phoenix), everyone had a personal assistant called “Samantha” that was so real, you forgot she was just software. But when AI comes to our world—and it will soon enough—I think we’ll be seeing more AI assistants inside businesses than we’d expect. Our sales teams are among those that could utilize AI to increase results, as well as boost productivity at the same time.

What is AI?

AI involves the use of various technologies, such as machine learning, natural language processing, and computer vision, to enable computers to learn from data and make decisions based on that learning. It allows computers to process and analyze vast amounts of data much faster than humans and to identify patterns and relationships that humans may not be able to see.

AI may seem like science fiction to some, but it is already being used by many businesses and sales teams to improve their processes and results. As AI technology continues to evolve, we will see even more innovative ways for salespeople to use AI in their sales efforts.

Here are a few examples:

- 1. Lead generation:** AI-powered tools can analyze customer data and help salespeople identify and target high-quality leads more efficiently. This can save time and resources that would otherwise be spent on low-quality leads.
- 2. Personalization:** AI can help salespeople personalize their customer interactions by analyzing data on their preferences, past purchases, and behaviors. This can improve customer experience and increase the likelihood of making a sale.
- 3. Predictive analytics:** AI can help salespeople identify patterns and trends in customer behavior and buying habits, which can be used to predict future sales opportunities. This can help salespeople prioritize their efforts and focus on the most promising prospects.

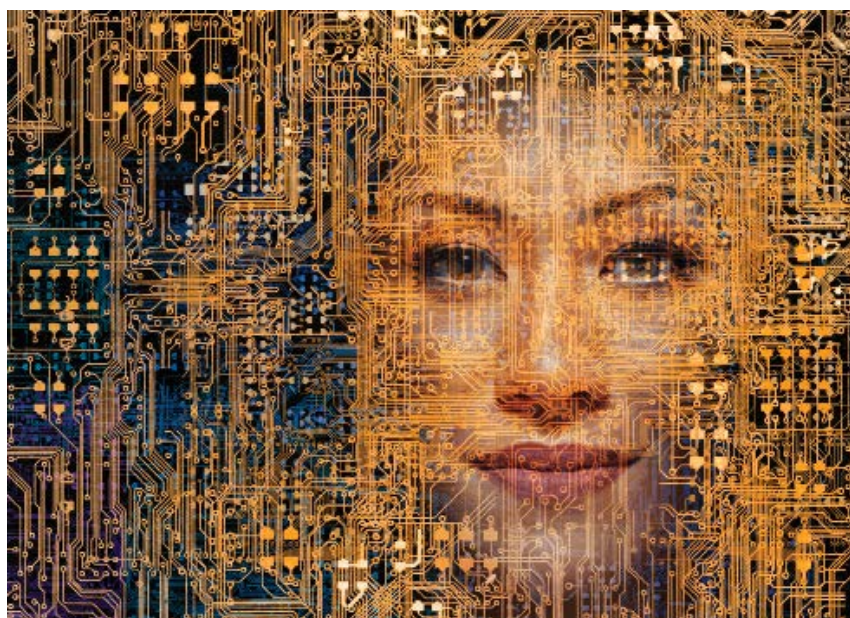
Be aware of the negatives

While AI has the potential to bring many benefits to a business, it can also have negative impacts if not implemented or used correctly. Salespeople in the catering industry are under increasing pressure to achieve growth targets. To meet these targets, many salespeople are turning to AI for assistance. AI can be a powerful tool to help salespeople boost their productivity. However, some negative impacts should be considered before implementing any AI system.

1. AI can lead to salespeople becoming too reliant on technology and losing the ability to interact with potential customers personally.
2. AI systems can be expensive to implement and maintain, which can put small businesses at a disadvantage.
3. There is always the risk that data collected by AI systems could be used to unfairly manipulate or target customers.

To mitigate these risks, businesses must carefully consider the potential negative impacts of AI and implement measures to address them. This can include ensuring data used to train AI systems is unbiased, developing clear communication strategies for employees and customers, and monitoring AI systems to ensure they perform as expected.

Overall, the future of AI for sales reps is promising and will likely



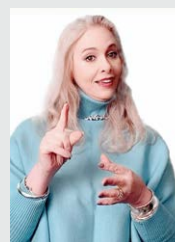
“The future of AI for sales reps is promising and will likely focus on improving efficiency, personalization, and accuracy in the sales process.”

focus on improving efficiency, personalization, and accuracy in the sales process. AI is here to stay, and it is up to us to harness its potential and ensure its development and use aligns with our values and goals as a society.

While AI is not meant to replace human sales reps, it can help them be more effective and efficient. There is no replacement for the compelling human relationship!

I bet you're wondering if artificial intelligence wrote this article?

The answer is no, but I did use AI for research. 



With 30 years of experience owning event planning, high-end catering, and design and décor companies, Meryl Snow is on a mission to help businesses get on their own path

to success. As a Senior Consultant for [Certified Catering Consultants](#) and a Senior Consultant & Sales Trainer for [SnowStorm Solutions](#), Meryl travels throughout North America training clients in the areas of sales, marketing, design, and branding. As a valued industry speaker, she speaks with groups from the heart with warmth and knowledge, and she covers the funny side of life and business.



Don't Be Whelming

My wife, April, and I recently went out to dinner and the word we both used to describe our experience was “whelming.” It wasn’t a bad dinner, but there was nothing that stood out or impressed us. The service was fine, the food was good, and the pricing for what we received was fair, but we both felt like there was no reason to go back to that restaurant.

In the comedy movie *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), Chastity Church asks, “I know you can be underwhelmed, and you can be overwhelmed, but can you ever just be whelmed?” Although historically from Middle English “*whelm*” and “*overwhelm*” were used interchangeably and both meant “to overturn” or “to overpower in thought or feeling,” it wasn’t until people started using a third word, “underwhelmed” for “unimpressed,” that “whelmed” started being used to describe something as average or mediocre.

When demand is high and there is ample business at your door, it can be easy to default into a mode of mediocre.

We can gravitate to a new normal where impressing every customer and exceeding expectations is not necessary to win or stay in business. However, this is where companies differentiate themselves. When things turn and business becomes scarce, the reputation of the “awesome” service-providing companies distance themselves from the “average” service providers. Having built a loyal following, they continue to stay relevant and find ways to thrive in a wide variety of economic conditions. Often when this occurs, it’s too late for those average service providers to simply improve their offerings, so they begin to lower prices to win business, which leads to additional stress of shrinking margins, creating a downward spiral within their organization.

How do companies avoid the trap of providing “whelming” experiences for their customers? I find the problem is often rooted in an internal company culture. Too many companies spend most of their time and energy focusing on how to serve the guests and not enough time focusing on how they can serve their own team. It has been proven that when people love their jobs, they are more productive and successful. They learn faster, make fewer mistakes, and make better business

decisions. They take pride in what they do and are inclined to provide higher levels of service. In other words, by prioritizing your team first, they will then in turn serve the clients and guests.

Stand out

To create a culture that isn't "whelming," start by understanding what makes your company unique. What differentiates the employee experience in your organization compared to that of others? If nothing comes to mind, you might have some work to do. Sometimes we resist the temptation to be different for fear of not fitting in and we resort to "what everyone else does:" the standard holiday party or picnic, the basic benefits package, and managing to do the minimum of what is mandated in terms of employment laws. Companies that attract top talent tend to have an edge and are willing to push the limits on what has been done with culture. At Footers Catering, our annual lip sync battle, five-year anniversary trips, and our Thanksgiving thankful tradition are examples of things that get a lot of attention for their uniqueness.

Show the love

How can you expect an employee to go above and beyond for a customer when they don't feel respected at work or appreciated for the work they do? Leaders should be spending time each week praising the efforts of team members, writing notes of gratitude, and asking questions to get to know the people they work with. These things cost little to no money but require an investment of your time—and that investment in your time is what shows your team that you care about them. When team members feel loved, cared for,

and supported, they are much more willing to go above and beyond for the company. They also build stronger relationships with their co-workers and are less likely to leave the organization.

Continuous improvement

Companies that are known for wowing customers continuously push themselves to "make it better every day" or MIBE (*Editor's Note: MIBE is the name of Footers' sister company*). They don't settle for the status quo or how things have always been. They encourage everyone in the organization to look for ways to improve efficiencies, the services they provide, and the employee experience. They celebrate small incremental improvements, not just the major breakthroughs. This energy becomes contagious and team members are inspired to put in extra effort as opposed to looking for the path of least resistance. Companies that achieve a culture of continuous improvement make communication a priority throughout all levels of the organization. They are intentional about discussing mission, values, and purpose. They help employees understand the big picture and how their individual work contributes

to the efforts of the team. They put meaning behind the work that team members do and provide a path for them to make significant contributions to the company.

When companies don't take their team members for granted, their team members don't take customers or business that comes in the door for granted. This becomes even more critical in industries like ours that mimic a live performance. My father used to stress: "We're only as good as our last party. There's no do-overs in catering, so every event needs to be perfect." Hospitality is booming right now. I continue to hear about caterers across the country not being able to find enough staff for the business in front of them. Despite all the headlines highlighting layoffs in the tech industry, unemployment is at a 53-year low and largely being driven by the rebound in our industry. Consumer spending on leisure and entertainment continues to reach peak levels. It is precisely at these times that we must resist the pull to "just get the job done" and push through to create awesome employee experiences so our teams can create guest experiences that are overwhelmingly awesome! 



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).



Server-passed arancini (asiago and Sicilian) were served during the Closing Night Celebration.



CRU Catering prepared pralines live for attendees during their *Seven Crazy Stations* session.



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

What's Cooking This

Here's a look at the top 10 food and catering trends seen during Catersource + The Special Event and Art of Catering Food

By Amber Kispert

All photos courtesy WASIO Faces unless otherwise noted

The Florida Sunshine Tour (Catersource + The Special Event along with Art of Catering Food) may be over (at least until February of 2024 when we head to Austin, TX), but inspiring catering and food trends seen during the week (turn to page 68 for this year's top event trends) will live on. Let's look at some of this year's hottest trends

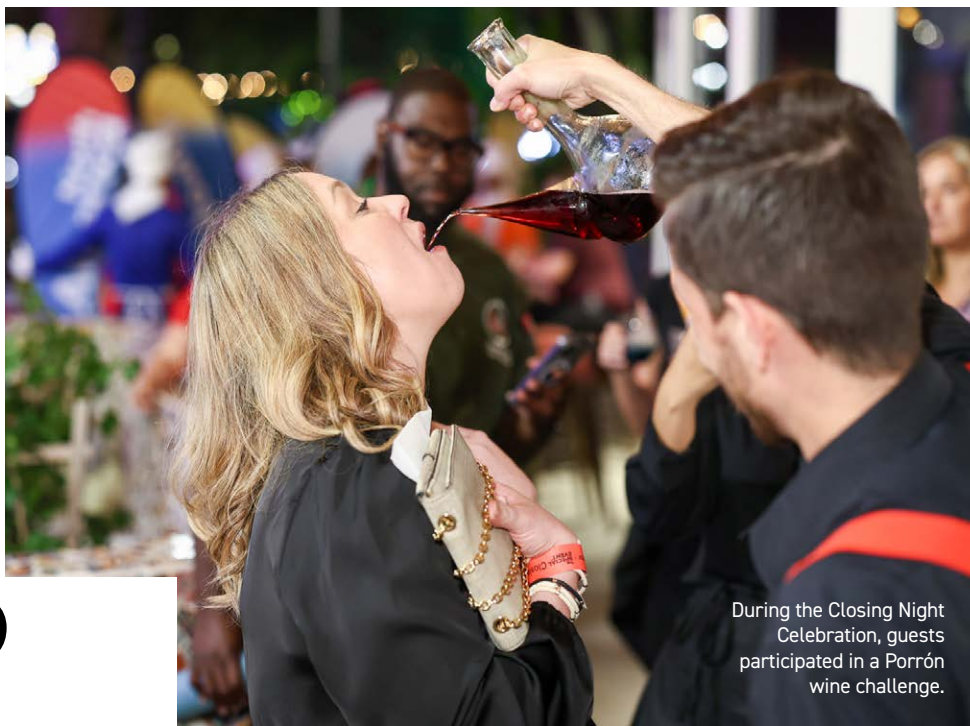
and how you can use them in your business.

"Trends are not just for the sake of being new," said Michaela. During the session *Caterers: Clever Concepts*

Let's take a look at what's new, and how you can use them in your business.



The Closing Night Celebration featured both a seafood and vegetable paella station.



During the Closing Night Celebration, guests participated in a Porrón wine challenge.

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not universal, and trends are not static,”
Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) in his
ers Assemble! - Tantalizing Trends,
epts, and Inspired Interactivity.

ook at what trends are popular now,
and what we can expect to see next.



**Trends are not universal, and
trends are not static. ”**

— Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts)



Puff 'n Stuff Events and Catering had a live tomahawk carving station during the Culinary Tour.

1. LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

With the pandemic firmly behind us, this year marks the return of the action station. Culinary theatrics are back.

On the live cooking side of things, today's caterers are making everything in front of guests: paella¹, tomahawk steaks², tortillas³, and ramen⁴ to name a few.

"Having a chef out there makes the difference," said Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) during *Culinary Theatrics: How to Get the Most Action Out of Your Station*.

"It's a chance for [guests] to see what's cooking."

"It's [also] a chance for guests to interact with the chef," said Jay Varga (The JDK Group) during *Culinary Theatrics*. "They can have a more natural conversation about why we're doing what we're doing."

Build-your-own bars continue to be all the rage; everything from tacos⁵ to poke bowls to waffles.

"Customization is key," Stavros said during his session. "Everyone wants it their way. It's all about abundance; it's all about choice."

Hawker trays are a great way to keep your action station moving throughout the event⁶.

Immersive and experiential dining is also trending, such as post-apocalypse ration walls and even a station where guests can "plant" their entrée choice and then it "grows" from a garden⁷.

Lastly, there are also stations that can get guests in on the action through interactive beverage stations⁸ and food stations⁹.

1) Seen during the Closing Night Celebration and CRU Catering's *Seven Crazy Stations* session; 2) Seen during the Culinary Tour to Puff 'n Stuff Events and Catering's facility; 3) Seen during AOCF; 4) Seen during *Culinary Theatrics: Getting the Most Action Out of Your Station*; 5) Seen during both AOCF (Lunch & Learn) and the Opening Night Party; 6) Seen during both the Awards Nominee Reception and the Closing Night Celebration; 7) All of which were recognized during the CATIE Awards Ceremony (turn to page 16 for more on these events); 8) Seen during both the Opening Night Party (luge shot) and Closing Night Celebration (Porrón wine challenge); 9) Seen in Sterno's booth on the Tradeshow floor

Art of Catering Food's Lunch & Learn featured a build-your-own taco bar. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



Hawker trays traditionally bring food to guests, but why not napkins? Champagne Creative Group could be seen roaming the Closing Night Celebration with their "napkin dresses," which guests could rip from as needed. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Server-passed arancini were the perfect one bite snack during the Closing Night Celebration.



Chef Phuoc Vo (CBK Catering & Events) demonstrated how to make tortillas live during Art of Catering Food's Lunch & Learn. Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov



Guests could help themselves to some sparkling rosé during the Opening Night Party courtesy of a fountain. Photo courtesy Amber Kispert



During the Culinary Tour, Puff 'n Stuff Events and Catering served up Florida fish tacos, which featured local mahi mahi. Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov



Local craft root beer (shown) and beers were served during this year's Culinary and Venue Tour as well as the Closing Night Celebration.

2. AUTHENTICITY IS KEY

Locally sourced ingredients continue to be in demand, but stocking local breweries, wineries, and distilleries are now on the rise as well.

“It’s time to start doubling down on what’s unique to your area,” said David Merrell (AOO Events) during his session *Current Trends in the Event Industry*. “Authenticity is absolutely the key. People want to travel and know about where they’re going to, they want that authentic connection to the destination that they are in right now.”

3. FOOD THAT TRAVELS

After the past couple years, the ability to gather and network is more important than ever, which is why “grab and go” food is becoming increasingly popular—it offers the chance to quickly grab a bite so that guests can continue to their next conversation.

“I love walk-around food,” Stavros said.

“It makes it so easy for the guests,” said Mike Bicocchi (Elegant Affairs) during *Culinary Inspiration & Trends with Andrea Correale*.

“Walk around food” can mean food on sticks¹, in cones², in glasses³, in boxes, or on spoons³. In terms of cones and sticks specifically, the look of the display can always be quite unique.

“They all stand up like soldiers, and they give a really great look,” said Andrea Correale.

1) Seen during the Culinary Tour and on the tradeshow floor; 2) Seen during the Closing Night Celebration and AOCF (*Apps that Slap!*); 3) Seen during the Closing Night Celebration

Chris Towne offered a chicken and waffle appetizer (served in a miniature waffle cone) during his Art of Catering Food session, *Apps that Slap!*



Ceviche shooters were served in martini glasses during the Closing Night Celebration.

During the Culinary Tour at Puff 'n Stuff Events and Catering's facility, attendees watched as popcorn skewers were prepared with nitrogen.





ACF Chef Ryan Manning showcased a number of unique garnishes during his session *A Chef's Approach to Mixology*.



Justin Pasha (The Cup Bearer) showcased several pretty garnishes (including everyone's favorite "the flavor blaster") during his cocktail sessions (*Experiential Cocktails* and *Cocktail Trends with Pasha and Jeff*).

4. TOP THAT!

Condiments and **garnishes** are becoming increasingly popular in dishes and cocktails to take it from good to great.

"This is your chance to take them up another level," said Chef Karen O'Connor (Daniel et Daniel) during her AOCF session *Top That!* "You can add another little hit of flavor, or color, or texture to finish your plate and make it brighter."

Catersource + The Special Event as well as AOCF looked at some unique garnishes and condiments throughout the week. For example, Varga discussed the power of caviar pearls (made with powders such as balsamic, lemon, or wasabi and sodium alginate) during his AOCF session *Salads... Who Needs Lettuce?* (turn to page 62 for more on his session and for Varga's wasabi pearl recipe).

"It's an easy way to elevate any plate," he said. "When you think of molecular gastronomy, you think of it as very precise, but it's not as scary as most people think."

Correale also touched on the molecular gastronomy trend when she discussed microsphere garnishes as well as fluid gels.

In her session, O'Connor touched on such sauces as banana ketchup, green chermoula labneh, beet jam, scallion ginger relish, green apple and bacon vinaigrette, red chimichurri, and wowee mustard sauce.

ACF Chef Ryan Manning got in on the garnish and condiment talk during his session *A Chef's Approach to Mixology* and his incorporation of jams and jellies, cookie cutter garnishes, and custom edible photo garnishes.



ACF Chef Ryan Manning garnished a classic margarita with a miniature sombrero. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



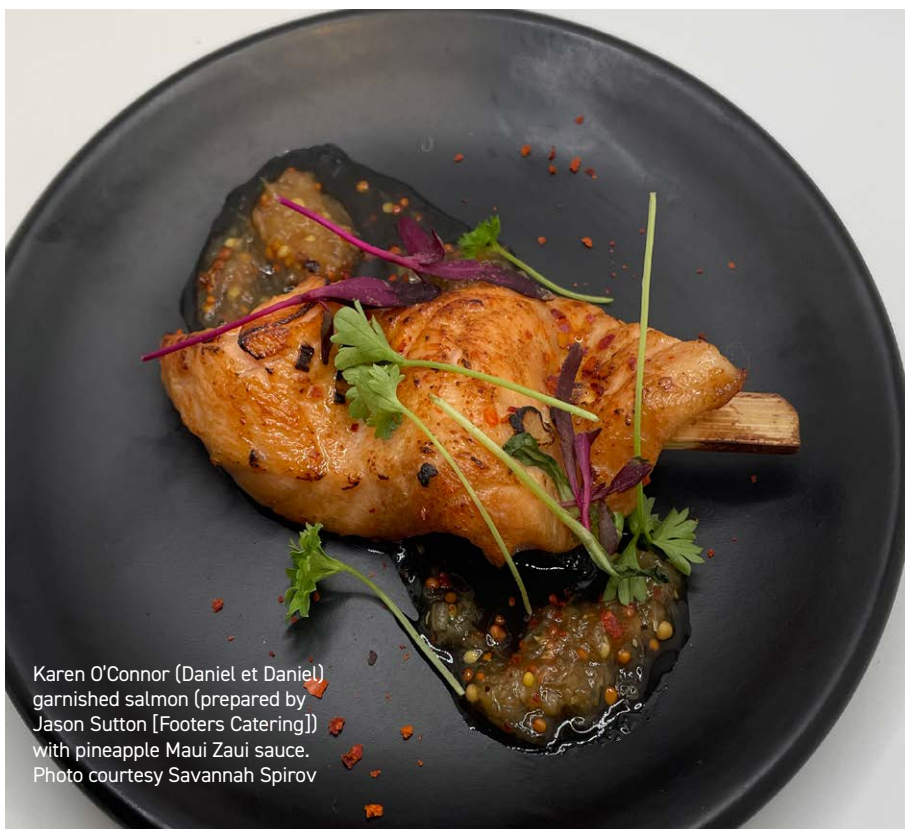
Jay Varga (The JDK Group) used wasabi pearls to garnish his ahi tuna salad bite (sesame crusted ahi tuna with deep fried Lotus root, mandarin aioli, quick pickled English cucumber, fresh orange segments, tangerine lace). Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov



Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) garnished his top sirloin bite (during AOCF) with a gorgonzola dipping sauce (prepared by Karen O'Connor [Daniel et Daniel]). Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov



Edible flowers (as Justin Pasha [The Cup Bearer] demonstrated) are always a classic cocktail garnish.



Karen O'Connor (Daniel et Daniel) garnished salmon (prepared by Jason Sutton [Footers Catering]) with pineapple Maui Zau sauce. Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov

5.

VEG-ABILITIES

Vegan and vegetarian diets continue to be on trend, and one ingredient is trending above all others: mushrooms.

“We want to be making dishes so memorable that you only want that dish,” said Pam Smith during her session *Veg-“abilities”: Curating Plant-forward & Plant-based Menu Items That Are Craveable, Flexible & Forgivable*. “Mushrooms are the answer you’ve been looking for—they’re great for the tastebuds, they’re great for the body, and they’re great for the planet.”

Mushrooms have become so popular that *The New York Times* named it the 2022 ingredient of the year.

“They were big last year, they’re big again this year,” Stavros said. “People are loving the mushroom diet.”



Pam Smith prepared a number of mushroom-centric dishes during her session *Veg-“abilities”: Curating Plant-forward & Plant-based Menu Items That Are Craveable, Flexible & Forgivable*.

6.

MAKE THE DOUGH

Now, doughnuts aren’t anything new. Doughnut walls have come and gone, and the cronut craze has started to settle down. But doughnuts still remain popular.

“Doughnuts are the new thing,” said Nettie Frank during her AOCF session *Beyond Basic: Doughnuts = Dollars* (where attendees enjoyed a blueberry cobbler doughnut). “They never go out of style.

“Dress it up, make it savory, make it sweet. Elevate it, be innovative, be creative. These are fun little pastries that we want to pipe and decorate.”

Over the years doughnuts have evolved to include myriad hybrid versions (i.e., cronut¹, waffle doughnuts, cannoli doughnuts, macaron doughnuts, doughnut

sandwiches, etc.), and the presentation itself has even been elevated beyond the humble doughnut wall. Think doughnut cakes, build-your-own doughnut bars, doughnut cocktails, doughnut towers, and even flaming doughnuts².

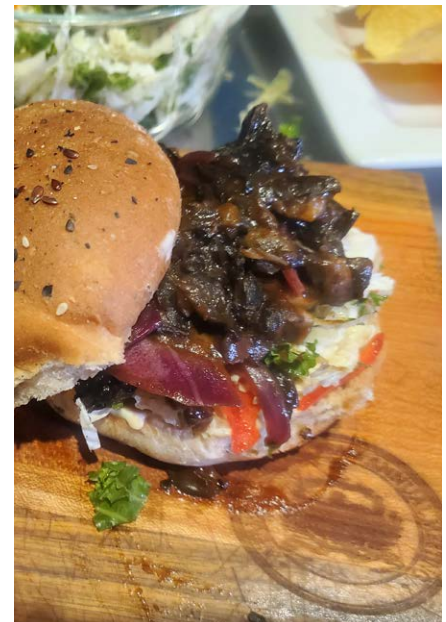
The doughnuts market is estimated to grow at a **CAGR of 2.65% between 2022 and 2027**. The size of the market is forecasted to increase by \$3.2 million.

“Even though it’s something that’s been around for hundreds of years, you can still create something out of that and make it new and exciting and innovative and you can call it yours,” Frank said.

1) Seen during the Culinary Tour to Puff ‘n Stuff Events and Catering’s facility; 2) Discussed during AOCF (*Culinary Theatrics: Getting the Most Action From Your Station*)



Pam Smith prepared portobello fries (with a side of miso aioli) during her session *Veg-“abilities”: Curating Plant-forward & Plant-based Menu Items That Are Craveable, Flexible & Forgivable*. Photo courtesy Amber Kispert



Pam Smith prepared a “barbecue pulled port sandwich” (pulled portobello mushrooms), which she served alongside portobello fries during her session *Veg-“abilities”: Curating Plant-forward & Plant-based Menu Items That Are Craveable, Flexible & Forgivable*. Photo courtesy Amber Kispert

7.

MR. ROBOTO

From cocktail-making to burger-flipping, many food and beverage businesses are beginning to discover the benefits of using robots to improve their productivity.

Autonomous food service robots (such as Matradee and Servi) are already beginning to pop up in hotels and restaurants, but rest assured they'll be coming to catering as well.

"It's coming. This is not going to be a fad, this is going to be a thing," Stavros said.

Will we see full-fledged robots serving at events? Probably not. Will kitchens be manned by robotic chefs? Unlikely. But they'll definitely be helpful with kitchen prep, especially when talking about robotic arms.

"The robotic arm thing is getting to a point where it's going to be practical for caterers," Stavros said. "This is not eliminating the need for chefs, but this offers you that perfect precision piece."

8.

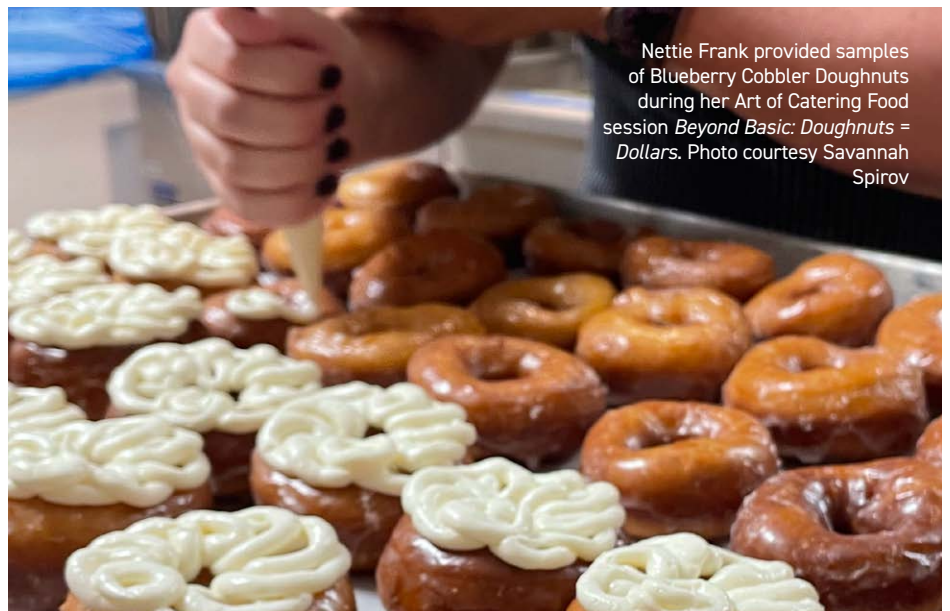
MOCK IT UP

The sober curious movement (the minimizing or elimination of alcoholic beverages) is here and it's here to stay.

"The sober curious trend is for people who typically drink in a social setting but have considered changing how much and how often they drink," Stavros said.

Consider these statistics:

- #DryJanuary has 86 million views on TikTok
- #SoberCurious has 301 million views on TikTok
- #Mocktail has 670 million views on TikTok



Nettie Frank provided samples of Blueberry Cobbler Doughnuts during her Art of Catering Food session *Beyond Basic: Doughnuts = Dollars*. Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov



During the Culinary Tour at Puff 'n Stuff Events and Catering, attendees were able to top off their cronut with an assortment of add-ons including sprinkles, nuts, and crushed cookies.



Technology Leaders and Creators were spotted on the tradeshow floor demonstrating their robotics technology, including a robotic arm holding a glass of wine. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



During the Venue Tour (to The MEZZ), Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering served up the Mezzmerizing Spritzer (muddled cucumber, lemon juice, lime juice, agave, club soda, and garnished with a cucumber slice).



(Above and below) A non-alcoholic cocktail, the Blue Iceberg Mango Mule (ginger beer, honey syrup, mango puree, lime juice, and fresh cucumbers), was served during the Closing Night Celebration.



“For someone who doesn’t imbibe, now they can have a cocktail,” Stavros said. “I don’t even like to call it a mocktail because they’re made with spirits, they’re just distilled to have no alcohol.”

Some of the most popular brands in today’s market for non-alcoholic spirits are Seedlip, Droplet, Ghia, Figlia, and De Soi.

Regarding **non-alcoholic cocktails** however, it’s important to remember to treat them 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.

“The way to do it is by implementing the same key elements,” said Michelle Bueno (The Cup Bearer) during the session *Experiential Cocktails*. “You still have to create that theatrical element.”

“If you think about it, a lot of the cocktail additions don’t actually have to do with the liquor,” Justin Pasha (The Cup Bearer) said during the session. “These are additional experiences.”

9.

SHELL SHOCKED

Seafood, specifically shellfish, is continuing to trend.

Global fish consumption has doubled since 1998 and is projected to nearly double again by 2050, according to the Food Institute.

Shellfish (shrimp¹, oysters, lobster, and crab) continue to be some of the most popular menu items year after year.

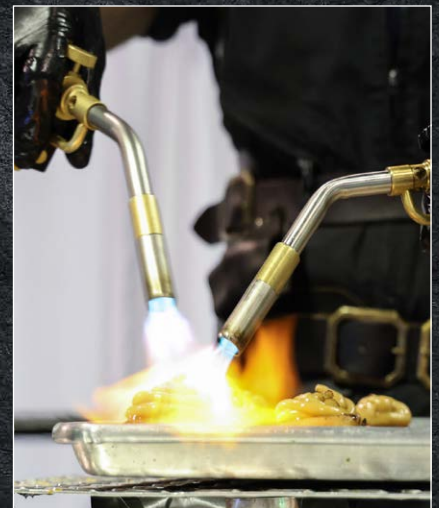
Shellfish can even make a play in terms of the action station trend in the form of ice bars (turn to page 100 for more on this trend) and even



SPOTTED ON THE TRADESHOW FLOOR

Throughout the week, Catersource + The Special Event's Tradeshow floor was packed full of on-trend exhibitors displaying everything from rentals to lighting to entertainment. Here are a few that we spotted throughout the week who can help you incorporate some of the hottest event trends.

- Fresh Origins (garnishes)
- Platemate (vessels, sticks, and silverware)
- Cyprus (vessels, sticks, and silverware)
- VerTerra (vessels, sticks, and silverware)
- Gelatys (vessels, sticks, and silverware)
- Sterno (interactive S'mores station)
- Champagne Creative Group (hawker trays)
- Technology Leaders and Creators (service robots)
- State Fair Mini Donuts Inc (doughnuts)
- Ice Pro (luge shot)
- Florida Robotics (service robots)
- Gourmet Foods International (shellfish)
- Foodstiks Disposable Cutlery (vessels, sticks, and silverware)
- American Beverage Marketers (non-alcoholic cocktails)
- Gastro Garage (action stations and doughnuts)



(Clockwise from top left) On the Tradeshow floor, a sweet treat on sticks was spotted over at the **Gelatys** booth. | **Sterno** allowed guests to make their own s'mores on the Tradeshow floor. | **Gourmet Foods International** had plenty of shellfish on display in their booth. | **VerTerra** had a number of unique vessels on display in their booth. | **Gastro Garage** torched doughnuts and gave them out as free samples on the Tradeshow floor. | **Heartisan Foods** showcased their local cheeses. | **Technology Leaders and Creators** were spotted on the Tradeshow floor demonstrating their **robotics technology**, including a robotic arm holding a glass of wine. All photos courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Mini Maine Lobster Rolls (fresh lobster meat, creamy dressing, toasted New England bun) were served during the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Oysters (with a champagne mignonette) were served as part of Connect Live. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



"Shrimp on the barbie" was included in the Australia food station during the Closing Night Celebration's international food tour.

rolling oyster carts².

"These are premium items that carry a premium price," Stavros said.

1) Served during AOCF (*Dry Pasta: The New Risotto*) and Connect Live; 2) Discussed during *Culinary Theatrics: Getting the Most Action Out of Your Station*

10. ASIAN INSPIRATION

Asian food (everything from [Dim Sum](#) to pho to ramen¹ to potstickers² to bao buns³ to canned fish) is trending on menus across the country. Fusion⁴ dishes are also trending.

"Asian food is still a huge influence, and it will continue to be," Stavros said. "These are fun foods, finger foods."

Catersource + The Special Event attendees got to experience a taste of Asian cuisine throughout the week; however, the true star of the week was Chef Yia Vang (who delivered the keynote during AOCF) when he discussed the important role food plays in terms of culture.

"Hmong isn't a type of food, it's a philosophy of food," he said. "If you remove one of these elements (rice, protein, vegetable, and hot sauce) it would not be considered dinner—it's a snack. All of those ingredients work cohesively together. Hmong food is all about cohesiveness, about balance. Food has to work together."

These are the trends that we think will stay popular throughout the rest of 2023; what trends caught your eye during Catersource + The Special Event?

1) Seen during *Culinary Theatrics: Getting the Most Action Out of Your Station*; 2) Served during Connect Live; 3) Sampled during AOCF (*Apps that Slap!*); 4) Two of this year's DICED competitors prepared Asian-inspired burgers; Puff 'n Stuff Events and Catering substituted a wonton shell for a taco shell during the Venue Tour. **CS**



Andy Krause, Jason Sutton (pictured), and Jay Varga demonstrated how to use a ramen siphon (as part of an action station) during their session *Culinary Theatrics: How to Get the Most Action Out of Your Station*.



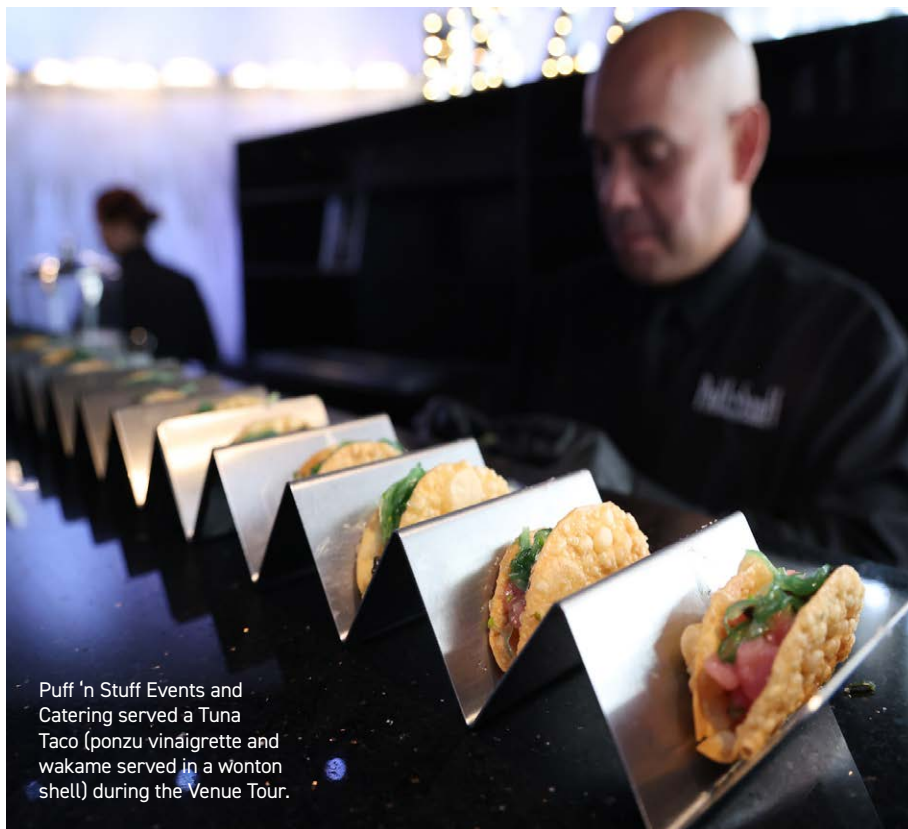
Bryce Cherven (Footers Catering) prepared an Asian-style burger with Korean barbecue sauce, kimchi slaw, and rice wine pickled cucumbers on the side.



Joshua House (The JDK Group) submitted a bison meatloaf slider with a banh mi slaw and Thai chili sauce in this year's DICED competition.



Following Yia Vang's keynote during Art of Catering Food, attendees could sample his skirt steak (marinated in oyster sauce, fish sauce, oil, and Szechuan coffee rub) which was served with his Tiger Bite sauce and rice. Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov



Puff 'n Stuff Events and Catering served a Tuna Taco (ponzu vinaigrette and wakame served in a wonton shell) during the Venue Tour.

ABIGTHANKS

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Catersource + The Special Event could not offer our attendees the unforgettable experience we do without the support of our generous sponsors. **We salute them here:**

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CHAMPAGNE CREATIVE GROUP

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EKLECTIC ENTERTAINMENT, LLC

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EVENT SHOW PRODUCTIONS

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REGAL CINEMAS

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connie@tskorman.com

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The Event Escape

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USTA/PUFF 'N STUFF CATERING & EVENTS

Leadership Lunch

Venue Tour

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tracy@puffnstuff.com

VISION SOUND & LIGHT

Main Stage

www.vslproductions.com
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BLUE LALA EVENTS

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BOLLOTTA ENTERTAINMENT

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BUFFET MP

Hands On Tablescape Design

Competition

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DARNEL FABRICS

Hands On Tablescape Design

Competition

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Opening Night Party

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SCENTEX

Leadership Lunch

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SHOW U PRODUCTIONS

Connect Live

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SMITHERS-OASIS

Hands On Tablescape Design Competition

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SUPPORTER

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BAKERS MAN PRODUCTIONS

Event Videography

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Pricing Theory & Practice for Caterers

One of the most complex calculations a caterer must make is how to price their products, and pricing strategies tend to be specific to different catering sectors. In the full-service catering world, where much of what we sell is intangible experience and the cost of the product is relatively high, there are several primary goals from the seller's perspective.

First, the goal is to get the highest price possible without the client feeling as if they have been taken advantage of. The second is to use pricing to develop and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage.

The third is to use variable pricing to develop client loyalty, to the extent possible. Lastly, the pricing must be appropriate to maintain a reasonable profit margin.

Pricing breakdown by sector

Among the factors that make this pricing challenge so complex are the varying ways in which caterers, as well as their competitors in the events industry, charge for their products. The three largest sectors of the catering industry (on-premise, off-premise, and retail/delivery) each tend to have different pricing models. To make a comparison even more complex, the pricing structures and variances among caterers in different regions of the country can be vast.

“If lower prices were the primary motivating factor in decisions about using caterers, then budget caterers would rule. But they don’t.”

When we talk to caterers around the country to get an idea of their price point, we typically ask how much they charge for a wedding reception. Of course, a reasonable answer would be it depends on the wedding, but most caterers immediately give us their median price. The answers we get are fascinating, and from these we have been able to make several observations:

In the off-premise wedding market, the median price variance around the country is huge. Controlling for the different items included and service styles in a wedding package, the price range runs from less than \$50 per person in small markets in the rural South and Midwest, to more than \$200 in major coastal markets for a full-service wedding package, not including the venue.

What are the conclusions to be drawn by the difference in pricing for weddings?

The full-service catering market, which is dominated by weddings, dwarfs the other catering sectors. This market is shared by on- and off-premise caterers, hotel banquet operators, resorts, restaurants, clubs, and specialty event venues such as excursion boats and tourist destinations.

Despite the large number of entities competing in this market, overall peak load supply and demand seem to be much more in balance than in the delivery or corporate catering markets. Of course, there are many empty banquet halls and off-premise catering companies without much

business in the less busy times of the year. But in the peak seasons and dates for weddings, caterers are able to price aggressively. On spring and fall weekends every year, demand exceeds supply for wedding caterers and venues, so prices stay relatively high.

Not just about price

Many caterers seem to believe that price is the only determining factor in the decision that buyers make about which caterer to use, and that all buyers are extremely price sensitive. As an active observer of pricing by many caterers over many years, I feel confident in saying that this is empirically and provably incorrect.

When our consultants work with caterers to improve their sales intelligence, one of the recommendations that we make is that caterers survey any potential clients that decide not to use them after going through a proposal process, to find out the reason why.

Most caterers assume that the reason that they lose events at the

proposal stage is almost always because of price. But this is not at all the case—price is typically chosen by only slightly more than 50% of survey respondents based on surveys we have reviewed. A range of other reasons, none of which are directly price-related, make up the balance.

Another important point: if lower prices were the primary motivating factor in decisions about using caterers, then budget caterers would rule. But they don’t. They don’t even rule in the more price sensitive categories like delivery catering, and they certainly don’t rule in the full-service market.

One final point about caterers’ pricing—many or most caterers do their best to limit pricing transparency, making it hard for competitors and clients to see the prices being charged. But we know of several very successful and profitable caterers that do publish their price ranges, if not their specific prices. 



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.

He is a very hands-on consultant, and his projects provide an impressive return on investment.



Chris Taylor presented
Soul Foodusion with
Chef Chris.

Speaker Salute!

We at Catersource + The Special Event 2023, as well as Art of Catering Food, want to offer a big thank you to our outstanding speakers and DICED competitors.

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. **We salute them here:**

Alan Berg, Wedding
Business Solutions LLC

Alan Katz, Great Officials

Alexandra Schrecengost,
Culture with Us

Alexis Amato, Manifest
with Alexis

Alice Conway, CSEP
Emeritus, AC Event &
Hospitality Institute

Alicia Falango, California
Events Coalition

Alicia Smith, CRU Catering

Alyssa J. Habchi, Habchi
Inc.

Amanda Mora, Event
Group Houston

Amber Anderson, Refine
for Wedding Planners

Amber Gehring, Elegant
Affairs Caterers

Amy Iserman, Forte
Belanger

Andrea Correale, Elegant
Affairs Caterers

Andreina Morales,
Instawork

Andy Krause, Frederik
Meijer Gardens & Sculpture
Park

Angie Senter, Washington
State University

Anna Coats, Marry Me
Tampa Bay

Annette Naif, Naif
Productions LLC

Anthony Lambatos,
Footers Catering

Anthony Vade, CED+,
Encore Global

April Lambatos, Footers
Catering

Art Smith, Blue Door
Kitchen & Garden |
Southern Art & Bourbon
Bar | Art & Soul | Art Bird
& Whiskey Bar | Chef
Art Smith's Homecomin'
Florida Kitchen & Southern
Shine Bar

Ashleigh Morriss, Peace
Arch Hospital Foundation

Becky Basile, CMM,
HMCC, DES, Logiplan
Global Meetings & Events

Beverly Jones, PBJJ LLC

Bill Hansen, Bill Hansen
Hospitality Group

Bobbi Brinkman, Bobbi Brinkman Photography/Consulting

Bobby Braun, Shelter Event Equipment

Boris Seymore, ACF, BDS Catering and Productions LLC

Brian Arliss, Partyman Catering

Brian Green, By BrianGreen

Brian Stumph, Fred's Tents

Bryan Neuschaefer, Saz's Hospitality Group

Bryce Cherven, Footers Catering

Carl Sacks, Leading Caterers of America

Carolyn Ent, Elon University

Charessa Sawyer, SC Visionary Planning and Production

Charlene Liu, Higher Education User Group

Charlie Schaffer, Schaffer LA

Chris Ilias, Groovin' Gourmets

Chris Towne, Partyman Catering

Christi Carey, Your Destination Connect

Christie Osborne, Mountainside Media

Christopher Salem, SUNY Westchester Community College Suny

Christopher Shelley, Illuminating Ceremonies

Christopher Taylor, Chris Evans Events and Catering

Christopher Warnack, Continental

Christy Foley, E-Mediation Services

Cindy Novotny, Master Connection Associates

Claudia Koehler, VOK DAMS Events & Live-Marketing Worldwide

Clint Elkins, SB Value

Clint Upchurch, Tres La Catering

Colbért Callen, Footers Catering

Colja Dams, VOK DAMS Events & Live-Marketing Worldwide

Colleen Hartigan, Footers Catering

Colleen Hauk, The Corporate Refinery

Conner Black, Footers Catering

Courtney Hopper, Hustle + Gather

Craig Howard, The Ballroom at Bayou Place

Cristian Hernandez, Rosendale Events

Dana Buchanan, Primal Alchemy

Dana Kadwell, Hustle + Gather

Danny Bergold, About Entertainment



Justin Pasha and Jeffrey Selden co-presented *Cocktail Trends with Pasha and Jeff*.



The always fabulous **Terrica** participated in a panel discussion and presented two individual sessions during this year's conference.



Anthony Lambatos presented two sessions this year: *Right Person, Wrong Position: Putting People in the Right Seats on the Bus*; and *State of the Industry - Workplace Culture*.

Speaker Salute!



Alan Berg delivered the following sessions during this year's conference: *Is Your Website Past its Shelf Life?*; *Perfection is the Enemy of Profitability*; *Stop Selling Food & Start Selling the Experience*; and *Your Brand is More Than Your Logo*.



Karen O'Connor (along with **Joanne Purnell**) presented *Designing Allergy Friendly Menus Everyone Will Love*. O'Connor also presented during *Art of Catering Food* with her session *Top That!*



David Porto inspired audiences with his session *Treat Your Clients Like Gold, Treat Your Team Even Better*.

Darin Bahl, Tailored Twig

Darrin Roberts, Club 33
Membership Experience &
Administration, Disney

Dave McCandless,
Sodexo at Hobart & William
Smith Colleges

David Hanscom, Y?
Entertainment

David Kelty, Polar Leasing

David Kenyon, LEO
Events

David Kinney, Catering
Creations

David Merrell, AOO
Events

David Porto, Blue Plate
Catering

Dean Mistretta, Johnson &
Wales University

Deborah Elias, Elias
Events

Deborah Thomas, CDP,
CSEP Emeritus, School for
the Service Arts LLC

Delores Crum, Premiere
Events; Home-Tech
Industries, Inc.

Elizabeth Nutting, TK
Events Inc

Emily Zientek, Sodexo
Live! At OCC

Erin Rooney, Allseated

Fausto Pifferrer, Blue
Elephant Events and
Catering

Francisco Christian,
Tailored Hospitality
Solutions, LLC

Gabriela Siebach, Cesco
Linguistic Services

Geoffrey Barker, Simply
Fresh Events

Grace Odogbili, Dining
with Grace Inc

Gwendolyn McNutt,
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Events Association

Heather Mason, Caspian
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Heather Pilcher, CSEP,
CMP, MS, Blue Spark
Event Design

Heather Rogers, Curated
Entertainment

Heidi Brice, Puff 'n Stuff
Catering

Holly Sheppard, Fig & Pig
Catering

Hugh Groman, The Hugh
Groman Group

Ian Ramirez, Madera
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Jaclyn Watson, Jaclyn
Watson Events

Jaka Jaiteh, AOO Events

Jamie Adams, Paisley &
Jade

Jamie Lee Quickert,
Cvent

Jason King, Pej Events

Jason Sutton, Footers Catering

Jay Klein, M-Plus Global Events

Jay Varga, The JDK Group

JC York, Classic Entertainment / Wise Guys Interactive

Jean Claude Etienne, Rosendale Events

Jeffrey Schlissel, ACF, The Bacon Cartel

Jeffrey Selden, Marcia Selden Catering

Jen Salerno, CMP, DES, JTS Connect, LLC | The Room Block Podcast

Jeniffer Bello, CMB, JB Experiences

Jennifer Best, All American Entertainment

Jennifer Perna, Fulton Market Consulting

Jennifer Trotter, Lip Service Makeup

Jim Rand, CaterStrat

Joann Roth-Oseary, Someone's in the Kitchen

Joanne Purnell, Good Gracious! Events

Joelle Paleologou, Peace Arch Hospital Foundation

John McLallen, The Chef's Table

Jonathan Jennings, CT Wedding Group

Jordan Heller, Suncoast Wedding & Event Leaders (SWEL)

Joshua House, The JDK Group

Julia Kendrick Conway, Assaggiare Mendocino, Inc.

Julie Ellis, The Chef's Table

Justin Ball, CMP, Bespoke Event Group LLC

Justin Pasha, The Cup Bearer

Karen O'Connor, Daniel Et Daniel

Kate Berris, Forte Belanger

Katerina Chagoya, Orange County Convention Center

Katie Mast, Rock Paper Coin

Katie Sparks, Pier Sixty

Kawania Wooten, Howerton+Wooten Events and the Enlightened Creative

Keith Krzeminski, Shelter Structures America

Keith Sarasin, ACF, The Farmers Dinner; Aatma

Kelly Hunt, LEO Events

Kevin Dennis, Fantasy Sound Event Services / WeddingIQ

Keyon Hammond, Get Plated

Kristin Banta, Kristin Banta Events Inc

Kristina Johnson, LEO Events

La'Zendra Danforth, CGMP, University of Central Florida College of Pharmacy

Laura Cardo, Kristin Banta Events Inc

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Leah Weinberg, Color Pop Events

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Mark Ellis, The Chef's Table

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Max Chapman, Nowsta

Meg Umlas, Boston University

Meghan Ely, OFD Consulting

Meghan Kates, The Chef's Table

Melissa Tibben, Total Party Planner

Meredith Commender, CSEP, Significant Events of Texas

Meredith Ryncarz, The Restart Specialist

Meryl Snow, Snowstorm Solutions

Michael Cerbelli, Cerbelli Creative

Michael Israel, Michael Israel Inc

Michael Stavros, M Culinary Concepts

Michelle Bueno, The Cup Bearer

Michelle Howard, Flora Couture

Mike Bicocchi, Elegant Affairs Caterers

Miro Diamanté, Accent Indy, A DMC Network Company

Speaker Salute!



Rich Rosendale and his team from Rosendale Events presented *Embracing the Future: Food, Inspiration & Adventure*.



Roy Porter delivered the following sessions this year: *Catering Shark Tank: To Taste or Not To Taste?*; *Hands-on: Plates from the Pass to Tables*; *How to Create Better Standard Operating Procedures*; and *Lean Catering: Eliminating the Nine Wastes of Catering!*

Mollianne Hubbs, All Occasion Catering

Molly Crouch, Sodexo Live!

Morgan Connacher, CSEP, Haute.

Mylo Lopez, MyloFleur

Natalie Lowe, Celebrate Niagara; The Sustainable Events Forum (TSEF)

Nettie Frank, Silver Whisk

Norma Jean Charette, Sodexo University Division

Oniki Hardtman, Oh Niki Occasions

Paige Mejia, Pyrotex

Pam Smith, RDN, PamSmith.com

Paul Buchanan, Primal Alchemy

Paul Seaman, PBJJ LLC

Paulina Corvi, Events by Paulina

Peter Lentz, Elegant Affairs Caterers

Peter McCaffrey, Leading Caterers of America

Phuoc Vo, CBK Catering & Events

Rajan Mistry, District Events & Catering

Rayven Crisafulli, CMP, CMP-HC, White Magnolia Weddings; University of Florida

Rebecca Salem, Allseated

Renee Adams, R.Collective

Renee Dalo, Moxie Bright Events

Resham Shirsat, Evolution Sustainability Group

Reuben Bell, Blue Elephant Events and Catering

Rich Rosendale, Master Chef, Rosendale Collective

Rob Barber, Atomic

Rob Pausmith, Tres LA

Robert Turner Jr, MJM Innovations

Robin Selden, Marcia Selden Catering

Rolando Espinoza, Champagne Creative Group

Ross Bock, CRU Catering

Roxy Quevedo, Zeta Event Productions

Roy Porter, Engage Works, Inc.

Ryan Corvaia, Dish Food & Events LLC

Ryan Hanson, CSEP, CED, DES, BeEvents

Ryan Manning, ACF, Chef Consultant

Sarah Gabel, Green Girl Events

Sarah Hall, Joel's Catering

Sarah Roshan, Sarah Roshan Collective

Scott Frankel, Animatic Media

Sébastien David, Sénik, The Event Agency

Selina Mullenax, CMP, CPCE, CORT Events

Shannon Tarrant,
Wedding Venue Map

Shaun Gray, Shaun Gray
Events, LLC

Shaunelle Murphy, SC
Visionary Planning and
Production

Sierra Reed, SC Visionary
Planning and Production

Steve Moore, Fox Theatre

Steve Sanchez, The JDK
Group

Steve Whyte, University of
the Pacific

Susie Perelman, Mosaic

Suzanne Morrell, Creating
Environments

Suzi McMerty Shands,
Mintahoe Catering &
Events

Syd Sexton, Catering by
Design/Colorado

Sylvain Grégoire, Sénik,
The Event Agency

Talley Moore, Ciena

Tamara Gibson, Tamara
Gibson Photography

Tammy (Weiting) Hsu,
CMP, SEPC, S&P Global
Market Intelligence

Terrica, Cocktails &
Details® / Terrica Inc.

**Terry Matthews-
Lombardo,** CMP, TML
Services Group, LLC

Thomas Pardo, The
Chef's Table

Tiffany Rose Goodyear,
Scentex

Tim Mitchell, Mangia
Catering

Todd Annis, CRU Catering

Tony Conway, Legendary
Events

Tracey Fricke, CSEP,
MWP, CMP, Occasion
Designed

Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP,
CMM, CHC, CVPM, thrive!
meetings & events

Trish Simitakos, Trish
Star Events

Tyler McQueen, Kenect

Velia Amarasingham,
Curated Entertainment

Vicki Brydon, Peace Arch
Hospital Foundation

Victoria Machin, Victoria
Machin Photography

Vijay Goel, Bite Catering
Couture

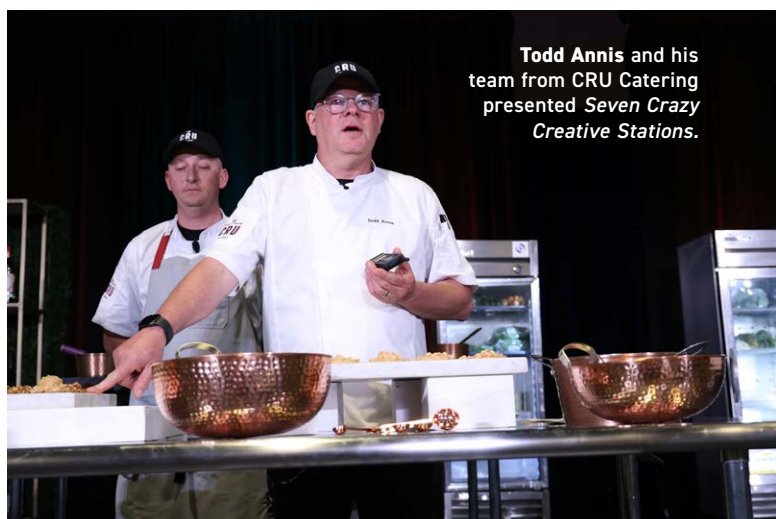
Winston Williams,
Catering CC

Yia Vang, Union Hmong
Kitchen

Zohe Felici, Felici Events;
Zohe Felici



Bobbi Brinkman
presented *Take
Better Marketing
Photos of Food with
an iPhone.*



Todd Annis and his
team from CRU Catering
presented *Seven Crazy
Creative Stations.*



Miro Diamanté presented *Drag Queens, Taylor
Swift, & House of the Dragon, OH MY! A Pop-Centric
Approach to Relationship Building & Sales.*

*
By Amber Kispert

Simply Salads

SALADS AREN'T JUST ABOUT LETTUCE ANYMORE

(Below) Tangy Avocado Three Bean Salad (garbanzo beans, black beans, cannellini beans, avocados, cherry tomatoes, cucumber, red onion, mint leaves, and Za'atar). Photo courtesy California Avocado Commission

The salad course can almost be considered a drumroll, an introduction to the main event: the meal.

“Nothing is more important than that first course,” said Jay Varga (The JDK Group) during Art of Catering Food, “that first impression you can make when serving guests.”

What comes to mind when you think of a salad? Is your first thought a traditional, greens-based version? There’s nothing wrong that type of salad, though it can sometimes be a little boring, as just lettuce on a plate is lettuce on a plate. Fortunately, there are a lot of different ways to dress up a salad without the use of lettuce.

“Lettuce has no flavor, and that’s an issue that really needs addressing,” joked Varga during his AOCF session *Salads... Who Needs Lettuce?*

Burrata

Burrata is gaining popularity as a salad base due to its versatility and the fact that there’s very little labor needed to produce a beautiful plate.



VEGGIE NOODLE SALAD

Recipe courtesy Jay Varga, The JDK Group

INGREDIENTS

- 1 oz squash, spiralized
- 1 oz carrot, spiralized
- 1 oz zucchini, spiralized
- ½ oz purple cabbage
- Cilantro for garnish
- ½ oz pickled watermelon radish (recipe below)
- 1 oz honey sesame vinaigrette (recipe below)

METHOD

1. Lay your spiralized noodles next to each other on the plate in the order of squash, carrots, and then zucchini.
2. Lay your pickled watermelon radish and red cabbage around the base of the spiralized vegetables and then drizzle with your vinaigrette.
3. Garnish with cilantro.

INGREDIENTS FOR PICKLED WATERMELON RADISH

- 1 lb watermelon radish, cut ½ inch thick
- ½ cup rice wine vinegar
- ½ cup granulated sugar

- 1 tsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp sesame oil

METHOD

1. Cut watermelon radish into ½ inch slices.
2. Whisk rice vinegar, sugar, soy sauce, and sesame oil together in a bowl until sugar is dissolved.
3. Pour over radish and toss together. Let sit overnight.

INGREDIENTS FOR HONEY SESAME VINAIGRETTE

- 2 cups rice wine vinegar
- 2 cups olive oil
- ½ cup honey
- ¼ cup toasted sesame oil
- ¼ cup tamari soy sauce
- 1 T ginger, minced
- 1 tsp garlic, minced
- 1 tsp kosher salt

METHOD

- Combine all ingredients and blend until fully incorporated.



“We can put just about anything with burrata and change the plate,” Varga said. “It’s a beautiful course, no lettuce needed.”

From the garden

Another way to approach salads is to embrace the bounty of available fresh produce.

“All the fresh vegetables, fruits, everything that you would traditionally use in the salad can still become components of the plate,” Varga said.

Think caprese salads and fruit salads. Seasonal, colorful, and fresh.

You may be wondering how these creative takes on salads can translate to a large event in terms of difficulty. “These are all things we do for large



Grape Cucumber Salad (mini cucumbers, green California grapes, sherry vinegar, scallions, garlic, and almonds). Photo courtesy California Table Grape Commission

events,” Varga said. “It’s not any more time consuming than plating up a regular salad.”

What about cost?

“The cost of that plate isn’t that much more expensive than if you just add some lettuce there,” Varga said, “and you can potentially charge more for it.”

Check out these simple salads (no lettuce needed). Bon Appetit! **CS**



HEIRLOOM WINTER SALAD

Recipe courtesy Jay Varga, The JDK Group

INGREDIENTS

2 oz burrata
3 ea. cherry heirloom tomatoes,
cut in half lengthwise
4 ea. heirloom carrot ribbons
Red beets, roasted and cut into coins
the size of a quarter (2 coins per plate)
Chioggia beets, roasted and
cut into coins the size of a quarter
(2 coins per plate)
Ground cinnamon, for garnish
1 oz orange balsamic glaze
(recipe below)

METHOD

1. Peel your beets and rub with oil, salt, and pepper. Roast at 375 degrees covered for 30 minutes. Let cool and cut slices $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. From there, cut quarter size pieces.
2. Use a peeler to shave your heirloom carrots and store in ice water to help them curl.
3. For plating, place your burrata at the center of the plate and arrange the cherry heirloom tomatoes and roasted beets around the base. Sprinkle the cinnamon on top of the burrata, beets, and tomatoes.

4. Add the carrot ribbons and drizzle with the orange balsamic glaze.
5. Garnish with micro greens and flowers.

INGREDIENTS FOR ORANGE BALSAMIC GLAZE

24 oz balsamic glaze
8 oz blood orange puree
1 T basil, chopped
1 T rosemary, chopped

METHOD

Mix all ingredients together.

ROASTED SQUASH AND GRAPE SALAD WITH PESTO

Recipe courtesy California Table Grape Commission

INGREDIENTS

- 24 oz cubed butternut squash (1½ inch pieces)
- 1 T extra virgin olive oil
- 1 T chopped fresh rosemary
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ cup prepared pesto
- 1½ cups halved red or green California grapes
- 4 oz bocconcini, drained and quartered
- 4 cups arugula

METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.
2. Place the squash on a sheet pan and drizzle with the oil, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Mix well and roast until squash is browned and soft, about 25-30 minutes, turning after 15 minutes.
3. In a large bowl, combine warm squash with pesto; add grapes and cheese and gently toss. Divide the arugula among four serving plates, top with the squash mixture and serve.



AHI TUNA SALAD

Recipe courtesy Jay Varga, The JDK Group

INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz sesame crusted ahi tuna
- 1 oz pickled English cucumber (recipe below)
- ¼ oz fresh orange segments
- 1 oz spicy unagi mayo (recipe below)
- ¼ oz wasabi pearls (recipe below)
- 0.125oz tangerine lace, for garnish

METHOD

1. Lightly rub your tuna with olive oil and then crust with sesame seeds. Heat up saute pan and sear on all sides for 30 seconds to 1 minute each and then let rest. Slice once cool.
2. For plating, lay your cucumbers as the base and top with your sliced tuna. Add in the orange segments and drizzle with the spicy unagi mayo.
3. Garnish with wasabi pearls and tangerine lace.

INGREDIENTS FOR PICKLED ENGLISH CUCUMBER

- 1 lb English cucumber, cut into matchsticks
- ¾ cup rice wine vinegar
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp sesame oil

METHOD

1. Cut cucumbers into thick matchsticks.
2. Whisk rice vinegar, sugar, soy sauce, and sesame oil together in a bowl until sugar is dissolved.
3. Pour over cucumbers and toss together.

INGREDIENTS FOR SPICY UNAGI MAYO

- 2 cups mayo
- 2 T unagi sauce
- 2 T sambal sauce
- 2 T siracha
- Juice from half a lemon

METHOD

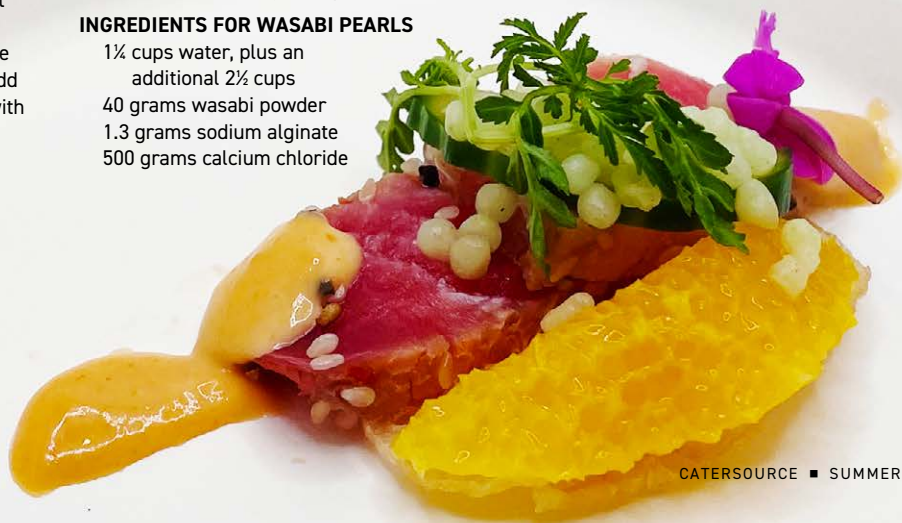
Combine all ingredients into a mixing bowl and whisk until fully incorporated.

INGREDIENTS FOR WASABI PEARLS

- 1½ cups water, plus an additional 2½ cups
- 40 grams wasabi powder
- 1.3 grams sodium alginate
- 500 grams calcium chloride

METHOD

1. Mix the 1½ cup of water with the wasabi powder and blend until fully incorporated. Once that is fully incorporated, add in the sodium alginate and blend again.
2. Next combine your 2½ cups of water with the calcium chloride and set aside.
3. Add your wasabi mixture to the Spherificator and drop into the calcium water. Caviar pearls will start to form. Strain out the pearls and put in a quart container for transport.





CUCUMBER MELON SALAD

Recipe courtesy Jay Varga, The JDK Group

INGREDIENTS

- 1 oz English cucumber, sliced
- 2 oz honeydew, cubed
- 2 oz cantaloupe, cubed
- ½ oz ricotta salata, sliced
- 0.125 oz jalapeno, about 3 slices
- 0.125 oz pistachio, crushed
- 1 oz honey chili vinaigrette (recipe below)

METHOD

1. For plating, arrange your cucumber, melons, ricotta, and jalapeno scattered on the plate but cohesive in design.
2. Sprinkle your crushed pistachio over everything and then drizzle with your vinaigrette.

INGREDIENTS FOR HONEY

CHILI VINAIGRETTE

- ½ cup pistachios, crushed
- 2 ea. jalapenos, thinly sliced
- ½ cup white wine vinegar
- 2 T honey
- ¾ cup olive oil
- 1 tsp salt and pepper blend

METHOD

Combine all ingredients and incorporate completely together.



GREEN GODDESS PASTA SALAD WITH CHILE ROASTED ACORN SQUASH

Recipe courtesy Iztayub Valenzuela for Barilla

INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz vegetable oil
- 14 oz pumpkin seeds
- 3 lb Barilla chickpea rotini
- Pasta water as needed, reserved
- 3 tsp salt
- 1½ lbs acorn squash
- 3 ea. avocados
- 5 oz yellow onions
- 3 oz garlic cloves
- 4 oz cilantro
- 12 oz lime juice
- 6 oz white vinegar
- 1½ tsp salt

- 2 tsp chili powder
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp ground black pepper

METHOD

1. Cook the pasta in salted water for 8-10 minutes. Remove pasta and shock with iced water, rinse pasta. Reserve pasta water.
2. Cut acorn squash into ¼ inch rings, remove seeds, rub squash with chili powder, cumin, salt, pepper, and a drizzle of vegetable oil. Roast squash for about 10 to 12 minutes or until a little tender. Cool down. Cut into a half-moon.
3. Mix pumpkin seeds with the same spices used for the squash and roast for 3 minutes. Cool down.
4. In a blender, add lime juice, vinegar, chopped garlic, chopped onions, cilantro, avocado, salt and pepper. Blend and add one ounce of oil and 2-3 ounces of pasta water gradually. Add a touch of salt if needed.
5. In a medium bowl combine cooked pasta and dressing; mix gently. Top pasta salad with half-moon acorn squash and sprinkles of pumpkin seeds.



BLACKENED CAULIFLOWER SALAD

Recipe courtesy Jay Varga, The JDK Group

INGREDIENTS

- 2 oz blackened cauliflower (recipe below)
- 2 oz burrata, cut in half
- Crushed pepitas, for garnish
- 1 oz fresh herb dressing (recipe below)
- 2 ea. micro flowers, for garnish

METHOD

1. For plating, alternate between blackened cauliflower and burrata. End with the cauliflower.
2. Top with the crushed pepitas and fresh herb dressing and garnish with micro flowers.

INGREDIENTS FOR BLACKENED CAULIFLOWER

- 16 oz cauliflower florets
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 tsp paprika

- 2 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp granulated garlic
- 1 tsp granulated onion
- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
- ¼ tsp red pepper flakes
- 4 ea. lemon wedges
- 1 tsp salt and pepper

METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 425 degrees.
2. In a bowl, toss cauliflower with olive oil and all spices except the lemon wedges. Lay out on a sheet tray with parchment paper and roast in the oven for 15 minutes.
3. Remove from oven and squeeze lemon juice on top. Then toss everything together (lemon wedges included). Place salad once again on tray and return to

the oven to roast for an additional 15 minutes.

INGREDIENTS FOR FRESH HERB DRESSING

- 2 oz basil, chopped
- 2 oz cilantro, chopped
- 2 oz chives, chopped
- 2 oz dill, chopped
- 1 tsp garlic, minced
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 1 T red wine vinegar
- 2 T olive oil

METHOD

Mix all ingredients together in a bowl.

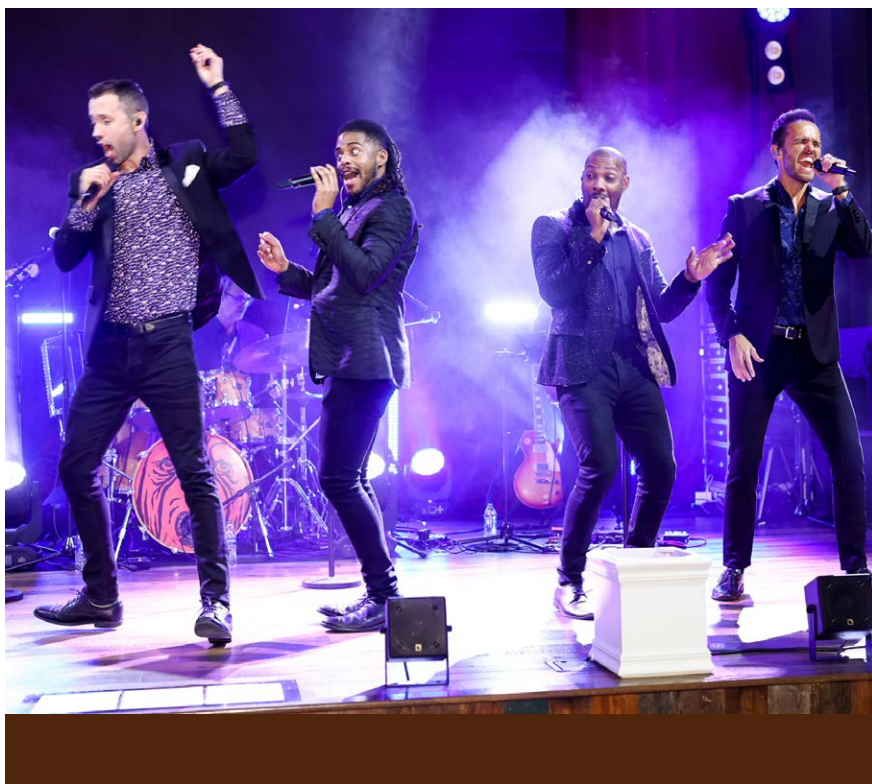
Note: Should look more like a chimichurri than an actual dressing.





CATERSOURCE + THE SPECIAL EVENT TAKE THE TREND

Check out the **top 10 event trends** seen at
Catersource + The Special Event



(Above from left to right) A duo of llamas posed for pictures outside of Kavas Tacos + Tequila during the Opening Night Party.

Biophilic design (a design concept that incorporates natural elements) is growing in popularity at events as a way to bring the outdoors in. Shown: The Floral Design Lab during Catersource + The Special Event.

The Company Men got the crowd moving during the Closing Night Celebration with their blend of “boyband meets Motown.”

Champagne Creative Group had a walking QR code throughout Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

All photos courtesy WASIO Faces unless otherwise noted

THE ON DS uring

Staying on top of event trends can be daunting, especially since they’re constantly evolving (regardless of how long they stick around).

“Event trends are a little more difficult to come by right now because the biggest trend is ‘How do we deliver?’,” David Merrell (AOO Events) said during his Catersource

+ The Special Event session, *Current Trends in the Event Industry*.

“The trend is to get your business back and operating.”

Fortunately, Catersource + The Special Event (held this past March in Orlando, FL) was the perfect one-stop-shop to hear (and in some cases see) the trends that event planners are talking about. Here’s a look at what’s trending, and what you should keep an eye out for during your upcoming events.



(Left) Pzazz Productions showcased one of its design pieces (featuring a furry friend) on the tradeshow floor.

(Below) A beer burro helped serve Dos Equis beers during the Opening Night Party outside of Kavas Tacos + Tequila. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Getting wild

It's become increasingly popular for animals to get their own invitations to events. Whether it's for photo ops, entertainment, or even as the bartender, today's events are truly getting wild.

Animals have always been popular photo opportunities at events (as evidenced by the llamas who posed for pictures during the Opening Night Party), but animals are also starting to become more integral to the event itself. For example, some events are setting up puppy play areas where

guests can get away from the stress of an event and instead enjoy a little animal therapy. Animals can also make for great event décor (as we saw on the Catersource + The Special Event tradeshow floor in the Pzazz Productions booth).

Animals are even starting to pop up as bartenders (as we saw during the Opening Night Party) in the form of beer burros; and we can't forget about the growing popularity of animal wedding attendants (one company, Furever Us, offers pet care services during events). Regardless of where this trend goes, there's no denying that it's an awfully cute one.

Bringing the outdoors in

Biophilic design (a design concept that incorporates natural elements) is growing in popularity at events as a way to bring the outdoors in.

"We're regaining connection with the natural world," said Kristin Banta (Kristin Banta Events) during her session *Design to Impact 2023*.

A few examples of this could be seen throughout the week at Catersource + The Special Event, specifically in the Floral Design Lab (which was part of



Michelle Howard (Flora Couture) and Mylo Lopez (MyloFleur) created beautiful floral pieces throughout the week in the Floral Design Lab (part of the Event Escape activations).



Strings on Fire took the stage during the Closing General Session where electric guitar and electric violin joined forces.



Vynilyn (Vinyl + Violin) performed during the Opening General Session. The trio mixed popular songs (played by a DJ) with electric violin performances.

the Event Escape activation) where florals were incorporated into a sitting area and even on a lamp.

Jazzed up entertainment

According to a [recent article from *Special Events* magazine](#), the demand for bigger and bolder entertainment is growing exponentially, and fortunately for us, Catersource + The Special Event didn't have any shortage of entertainment.

Electric violins

According to the article, roaming—and sometimes dancing—violinists are on the rise. These performers will dress up in their glitziest outfits and weave in and out among event attendees, often dancing or playing over pop tracks, as we saw multiple times throughout the conference (Connect Live, both the Opening and Closing General Sessions, and the Opening Night Party).

Stage performances

Of course, stage performances will always be great entertainment.

Burlesque shows (including brunches, bingo nights, and more) continue to grow in popularity (as we saw during Connect Live) and live art demonstrations are popular, according to [BizBash](#), as they not only provide event entertainment, but they can lead to event decor once the particular installation is complete (as we saw during the Opening Night Party and the Closing General Session).

Interactive stations

Playful interactive games and activity stations bring out everyone's inner child and competitive side, according



The VarieTEASE burlesque dancers (from BlueLaLa Entertainment) performed during Connect Live.



Attendees to Catersource + The Special Event were challenged to sleuth out miniature Volkswagen buses on the conference's tradeshow floor.

to the *Special Events* article. During Catersource + The Special Event, attendees were challenged to sleuth out miniature Volkswagen buses on the tradeshow floor.

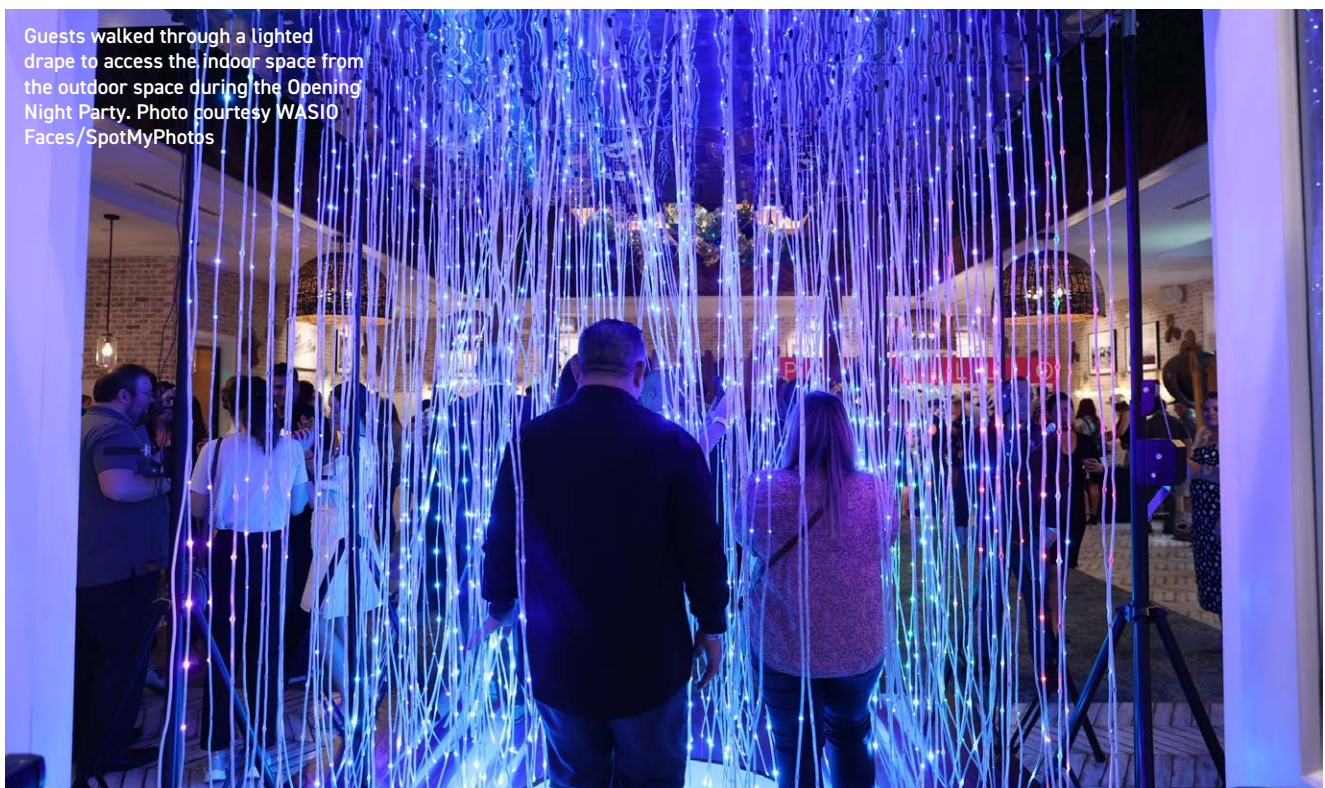
An immersive beginning

Immersive entrances are trending upward to “wow” attendees from the very first touch point, whether it’s

smoke, lights, greenery, a tunnel, or some sort of F&B offering.

“Give them content and interactivity from the very first moment that they walk in,” said Banta during her session. “Make them walk through something, engage with something.”

During the Opening Night Party, guests walked through a lighted drape to access the indoor space from the outdoor space.



Guests walked through a lighted drape to access the indoor space from the outdoor space during the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



(Above) During the Closing General Session, Sergio Gutierrez painted live on stage. During his demonstration, the Rolling Stones played over the speakers while he worked to create a lifelike depiction of singer Mick Jagger.

(Right) Mix on Wheels was set up throughout the week during Catersource + The Special Event where the vehicle not only housed a DJ booth, but also served as a great photo opportunity.

(Below right) The Good Times Roll photo bus delighted guests during the Opening Night Party with its many props.



Going mobile

Mobile activations are starting to trend as a way for companies to easily get in front of clients.

"It's a much more inexpensive way to get your marketing out there," Merrell said.

Beyond just driving someplace, these mobile vehicles can also be used for DJs and photo booths (such as those seen during Catersource + The Special Event), as well as for beer, wine, and coffee taps.

Horsin' around

Themes are becoming increasingly popular at events, everything from Roaring '20s to the zombie apocalypse are trending. "Everyone is asking for themes," Merrell said.

Airstar had a few Viva Magenta lights set up during the Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

Spotted on the Tradeshow Floor

Throughout the week, Catersource + The Special Event's tradeshow floor was packed full of on-trend exhibitors displaying everything from rentals to lighting to entertainment. Here are a few that we spotted throughout the week who can help you incorporate some of the hottest event trends.

- **Pzazz Productions** (live animals, photo ops)
- **Airstar** (pops of color)
- **Key Artist Group** (photo ops)
- **FiftyFlowers** (biophilic design)
- **Champagne Creative** (QR codes)
- **AGNYC** (photo activations)
- **Luminescence Production Services** (immersive entrances)
- **Global Special Effects Inc.** (immersive entrances)
- **Bluegrass Chic** (biophilic design)
- **Mix on Wheels** (mobile activations)
- **Good Times Roll** (mobile activations)
- **Michael Israel Studios** (stage performances)
- **BlueLaLa Events** (stage performances)
- **FRU Restaurant Group** (QR codes)
- **Imprint Event Group** (immersive entrances)
- **T. Skorman Productions** (jazzed up entertainment)
- **Progressive Artist Management** (jazzed up entertainment)
- **GL Entertainment LLC** (jazzed up entertainment)

One theme that has started to gain more traction is a western theme (which we saw in the CS+TSE 2024: Uncover Austin, TX Event Escape room).

“This is a big thing since *Yellowstone* came out,” Banta added.

Say cheese

Forget the traditional photo booth setup that you have seen time and again. Events are now getting creative with their photo activations as a way to engage attendees through props, living photo activations, and more.

“We want guests touching things, and not thinking that everything is hands off to them,” Banta said. “We want guests to engage with the décor.”

The Opening Night Party offered several photo activations (in addition to the mobile photo booth) where guests could pose with themed backdrops and costumed models.



The Opening Night Party offered several photo activations where guests could pose with props, fun backdrops, and costumed models.



(This column, top and middle) The CS+TSE 2024: Uncover Austin, TX Event Escape room invited attendees to create their own Texas-inspired keychain with the help of the Texas Leathercraft station from Sparks Agency.

(Directly above) Catersource + The Special Event is headed to Austin TX, February 12–15, 2024.

Top 10 Ways to Transcend Trends

1. Don't be afraid to take risks
2. Include one element done en masse (creates drama)
3. Incorporate a thematic art installation
4. Create interactivity
5. Make it relevant
6. Embrace local surroundings
7. Always sweat the small stuff
8. Provide engaging photo ops
9. Source unexpected materials
10. Find the humor

Information courtesy Kristin Banta's Design to Impact 2023

Key Artist Group brought the bold to the Closing Night Celebration.

Make it pop

“The word this year is bold,” said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during his session *Caterers Assemble! - Tantalizing Trends, Captivating Concepts, Inspired Interactivity*.

When talking about color, bold, saturated, concentrated (and even monochromatic) are trending.

“Get loud, get unexpected,” Banta said.

That preference for bold colors can certainly be attributed to this year’s Pantone Color of the Year, Viva Magenta (which could be spotted throughout Catersource + The Special Event).

“They tend to be on the pulse of what’s happening in the world right now,” Merrell said.

“Viva Magenta can really create a pop,” said Susie Perelman (Mosaic) during Merrell’s session.



Opening General Session keynote Marcy Blum got in on the Viva Magenta trend.



One of Pzazz Production's living décor pieces embraced the bold.



(This column, top and middle) Many of the Tablescape Design Competition entries incorporated florals in varying shades of Viva Magenta.

(This column, bottom) The Floral Design Lab (part of the Event Escape) featured plenty of floral arrangements that incorporated Viva Magenta into their blooms.

The Wellness Lounge, as part of the Event Escape, offered soothing music, beautiful scents, and comfortable seating. The space also hosted morning yoga, and an event therapy session with Charessa Sawyer and Sierra Reed.



“We don’t want to incorporate trends just for the sake of incorporating trends.” —Kristin Banta

Break the code

QR Codes are moving beyond just mobile tickets and digital business cards; they’re now popping up on dance floors, backsplashes, projections, on food, and in some cases, they’re even walking around (like the one from Champagne Creative Group that was spotted walking around throughout Catersource + The Special Event).

“I love this because it’s not just used in digital business cards for easier connectivity, but these are now being incorporated into design beyond just utilitarian use,” Banta said.

A wellness check

Many events are now embracing mindfulness and wellness through wellness retreats, guided meditations, and other wellness activities (which we saw in the Wellness Lounge, as part of the Event Escape activations).

“We’re taking a deeper look at how spaces have an impact on the way that we feel,” Banta said.

So, how will you incorporate these trends into your next event?

“Trends should be relevant to the client, but we don’t want to incorporate trends just for the sake of incorporating trends,” Banta said. “Lean into it, dial it up, and give it your spin.” 

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CATERING TO DIVERSITY

BY AMBER KISPERT





KEEPING IT CLEAN

The clean eating movement is on the upswing; how can caterers incorporate this into their offerings?

It can be challenging to keep up with the ever-evolving list of dietary restrictions: vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, paleo, dairy-free, and nut-free to name just a few. According to the [International Food Information Council's \(IFIC\) 2022 Food and Health Survey](#), 52% of Americans follow a specific diet or eating pattern, a 13% increase from 39% in 2021.

However, for many consumers (and chefs alike) there is one style of eating that is quickly becoming the default due to its health benefits and the fact that it can be customized to any diet: clean eating, which refers to eating foods as close as possible to their natural state. According to the IFIC survey, clean eating is one of the most popular eating patterns with 16% surveyed (followed by mindful eating at 14%, calorie counting at 13%, and plant-based at 12%).

“Clean eating for caterers is an opportunity to do what they do best—create delicious meals from scratch that surprise and delight, using local ingredients direct from the farm,” says Tracy Stuckrath

Lebanese-style lamb stew
with from-scratch flatbreads.
Photo courtesy Michael
Fenster/Red Tail Productions

(thrive! meetings & events). “It also allows them to more easily design menus around other dietary needs attendees may have by knowing what is in the menu item and how to adapt the recipe to meet needs.”

So, let’s take a look at clean eating: what it is, how to implement it into your menus, and how it can ultimately put you in a better standing with your clients.

What is clean eating?

As mentioned, clean eating is about eating fewer processed foods and more real, whole foods.

“Clean eating has become a spectrum, depending on each individual’s path,” says Sharon DeFelices (Mosaic Meetings and Events). “Clean eating includes healthy, whole foods with minimal processing. If you can pronounce the ingredients, that is a step in the right direction.”

When looking at foods that are considered “ultra-processed,” the clean eating pattern

is referring to foods that often have excessive amounts of undesirable sugars, salt, and fats added to their preparation “in order to maximize what is known as the ‘bliss point’ (the combination of sugar, salt, and fat that delivers maximum pleasure before a particular food is perceived as unpleasant),” according to American Culinary Federation chef and cardiologist Michael Fenster.

“Food has become a poor hungry ghost of its former glory,” Fenster said in a TEDx titled *An Ordinary Meal*. “It all starts with what we eat and what we need to eat is simply real foods, and ultra-processed foods are not real foods, they are either reassembled or fabricated—stitched back together like Frankenstein’s monster.

“Obviously, food is needed for health and life, but there is no need to consume ultra-processed foods outside of convenience. What we need to do now is empower the individual to reconnect, re-establish, and reforge their relationship to their food experience.”

Not to be confused with a vegetarian diet, clean eating also allows for the inclusion of animal protein (such as grass-fed beef or organic chicken) as well as dairy products (such as all-natural milk and cheeses).

“Clean” foods can essentially be defined by the rule of five: if more than five ingredients are in the ingredient list, then about 85% of the time, it is ultra-processed.

Fenster also encourages the avoidance of the six “danger zones”: salted meats, pre-prepared meals, flavored yogurts/white cheeses, energy and gourmet bars, breakfast cereals, and vegetarian (i.e., meat alternative) dishes.

“We need to put the plants back in plant-based,” said Pam Smith during Veg-“abilities”: *Curating Plant-forward & Plant-based Menu Items That Are Craveable, Flexible & Forgivable* (which she presented during Catersource + The Special Event this past March in Orlando, FL.)



Montana farmers' market vegetables.
Photo courtesy Michael Fenster/Red Tail Productions

“Clean eating for to do what they meals from scr delight, using lo the farm.” —Tracy



From-scratch 100% sourdough S
Photo courtesy Michael Fenster/

For caterers is an opportunity
 to do best—create delicious
 dishes that surprise and
 use local ingredients direct from
 the Stuckrath, thrive! meetings & events

Gin-pickled apples
 and white beets.
 Photo courtesy
 Michael Fenster/
 Red Tail Productions



From-scratch pasta with
 herbs and lobster. Photo
 courtesy Michael Fenster/
 Red Tail Productions



Warm Spring Salad
 with fresh morels and
 fiddlehead ferns. Photo
 courtesy Michael Fenster/
 Red Tail Productions



Sicilian-style pizza.
 Photo courtesy Michael Fenster/
 Red Tail Productions



Food with a purpose

One of the defining characteristics of clean eating (sometimes referred to as Culinary Medicine) is the health benefits associated with the foods that are considered “clean.”

“The health benefits of clean eating tie directly to the fact that foods in their natural state offer peak flavor and provide

more nutrients that we need to improve our heart and brain health, strengthen our immune systems, and boost energy levels,” says Stuckrath. “Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins and minerals, high-quality protein, and healthy fats that highly processed, pre-packaged foods typically do not because they are rich in fat, sugar, sodium, preservatives, and more.”

According to the [Mayo Clinic Health System](#), “clean” foods can help improve



Up your breakfast oatmeal options, like (pears, pepitas, and golden raisins) from Resort and Spa in San Antonio, TX. Photo

Montana wild antelope steak and farmers' market vegetables. Photo courtesy Michael Fenster/Red Tail Productions





• This Warm Vegan Farro Porridge
from Hyatt Regency Hill Country
is courtesy Sharon DeFelices

There is no need to consume ultra-processed foods outside of convenience. What we need to do now is empower the individual to reconnect, re-establish, and reforge their relationship to their food experience."

— Michael Fenster,
American Culinary
Federation

heart and brain health, assist with weight management, build a stronger immune system, and increase energy levels, among other benefits.

"As a cardiologist, I work to save lives. As a professional chef, I live to craft real delicious food," Fenster said in his TEDx, "but right now, there's very little food or life on our plates. We fundamentally changed the food that we have consumed since the dawning of humankind into something that people, and the bacteria in their gut that is so essential to health, have never ever eaten before. People are looking for food that promotes their health and well-being, not something that detracts from it."

According to [Unilever Foods' Future Menu Trends report 2023](#), one of the biggest trends for 2023 is "Feel Good Food," or "tasty dishes that boost the mind, body, and spirit."

"We need to serve food that is not only delicious, but that has a little bit of an eye on wellness," Smith said during her session. "The focus for so many years when it came to a dish that was prepared with an eye on health was really an eye on what to take out of the food: take out the salt, take out the sugar, take out the saturated fats, take out the calories; take out the flavor. What we need to do now is to put the focus on what to put in the food. 'What can I get from food? What's going to not only get me well, but keep me well?'"

Practical application

When thinking about clean eating from a practical perspective, caterers can easily leverage their existing relationships to help add clean options to their menus.

"You don't need to reinvent the wheel," says DeFelices. "Take a look at seasonal, local produce and get to know your growers and their farm practices. You are probably already offering more clean options than you realize."

Stuckrath and Fenster suggest these tips for incorporating clean options into your catering menus:

- Develop relationships with local/regional farmers: Visit their farm and potentially work with them to grow crops that you need/want.
- Communicate to your customers the quality of the food you are delivering, perhaps through something like recognition from the American Culinary Federation's Culinary Medicine Approved Kitchen (CMAK) program.
- Work with current food suppliers to understand whom they purchase from and who are the people behind those brands.



Potato leek soup (Potage Parmentier) with truffle goat cheese. Photo courtesy Michael Fenster/Red Tail Productions

- Purchase foods with fewer than nine ingredients (preferably fewer than five) that you can pronounce.
- Start growing some of the food yourself on your grounds, roof, or inside with a vertical farm.

"What is particularly powerful in our approach to clean eating is that it is not about deprivation; we are not eliminating whole classes of foods like carbs or gluten or focusing on a narrow nutrient-centric perspective like trying to make everything

low-fat or fat-free,” says Fenster. “There’s an incredible freedom of expression in being able to offer a wide range of foods that can accommodate an abundant and diverse assortment of flavor profiles.”

Menu considerations

When developing clean menus, below are some things to consider, according to Stuckrath:

Nutritional balance

Menu options should be designed to provide a well-rounded nutritional profile and meet customers’ dietary needs.

Ingredient quality

Emphasis should be placed on using high-quality ingredients and avoiding artificial additives, preservatives, and other chemicals, to keep with the principles of “clean eating.”

Freshness and seasonality

Fresh ingredients should be prioritized, and menu options should be designed to use seasonal produce whenever possible.

Food preparation techniques

Steaming, grilling, roasting, or sautéing are often considered healthier options than deep frying or heavy use of oils or sauces, so use these when trying to enhance the nutritional benefits.

Clean Eating Foods List

Fruit

- Fresh fruit
- Frozen fruit with no added sugar
- Dried fruit with no added sugar
- 100% juice

Vegetables

- Any fresh vegetable
- Frozen vegetables with no sauce or added salt
- Canned vegetables with no sauce or added salt

Whole grains

- Single-ingredient grains, such as farro, millet, oats, barley, quinoa, brown rice, etc.
- Whole-wheat pasta
- Popcorn
- Sprouted wholegrain bread and English muffins (with no added sugar)
- Whole-wheat pizza dough

Dairy

- Plain yogurt
- Milk
- Cheese
- Unsweetened non-dairy milks

Protein

- Single-ingredient meats: chicken breast, chicken legs, ground beef, etc.
- Seafood (choose sustainable options, such as wild salmon and pacific cod)
- Eggs
- Unflavored nuts (e.g., almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, walnuts)
- Plain nut butters (no added sugar)
- Dried beans
- Canned beans (rinse to reduce sodium by 35%)

Information courtesy Eating Well



Red Lentil Penne Spring Vegetable Carbonara, made with selected raw materials from responsible suppliers. Photo courtesy Barilla



A nut-free pesto (made with fresh herbs) can be served alongside an heirloom tomato salad with burrata and roasted portobello. Photo courtesy Culinary Ology



ra made with
upply chains.



Heirloom tomato salad with burrata. Photo courtesy
Culinary Canvas



Harissa and Honey Glazed Aussie Beef Stuffed Sweet
Potato (grassfed beef sirloin, sweet potato, and broccoli
rabe). Photo courtesy Aussie Beef & Lamb



h be served
rrata, or a
Canvas



This "zero-waste" dish (Aussie Grassfed Beef Short Ribs) from caterer and
chef Michele Lainez makes maximum use of every ingredient. The carrots
in the braise become a puree for the plate, while the carrot tops are in the
pesto. Celery leaves are incorporated into the celery slaw garnish. The
braise itself gets reduced to a silky sauce, concentrating the umami flavor.
Photo courtesy Aussie Beef & Lamb

Portion sizes

Menu options should be appropriately portioned to provide a balanced meal that meets nutritional needs without excessive caloric intake.

Customization options

Scratch cooking eases customization of menu items to adapt by dietary needs and preferences.

Flavor and culinary creativity

While clean eating emphasizes the use of whole, unprocessed foods, it's important to also prioritize flavor and culinary creativity to make the menu options delicious and enjoyable. Using herbs, spices, and other natural flavor enhancers can help create tasty and satisfying meals.

Sustainability and environmental impact

Partnering with your local farmers gives you a leg up on meeting the sustainability measures that many corporations are looking to achieve.

Cost considerations

When developing clean eating menu options, using high-quality ingredients and following sustainable practices may impact the overall cost of the menu items, and pricing should be set accordingly to ensure profitability.



(Right, from top to bottom) Spring Rolls (rice paper, mixed vegetables, cilantro, and sweet Thai chili sauce). Photo courtesy Culinary Canvas

Roasted Portobello (portobello mushroom, purple potato puree, fried carrot ribbons, and nut-free pesto). Photo courtesy Culinary Canvas

Seasonal Vegetable Salad (romaine, parmesan crisp, cucumber, marinated tomato, pickled red onion, and balsamic vinaigrette). Photo courtesy Culinary Canvas

Orange and Fennel Salad (harissa carrots, dates, and arugula) from Constellation Culinary Group. Photo courtesy Sharon DeFelices



Cutting Costs

To help alleviate the potentially higher costs of implementing clean menus, caterers need to be strategic and creative.

✓ **Source local and seasonal ingredients**

Local and seasonal ingredients are often fresher and more cost-effective compared to imported or out-of-season produce. Work with local farmers and suppliers to source high-quality ingredients at competitive prices. This also supports the local economy and reduces transportation costs.

✓ **Optimize ingredient use**

Minimize food waste by optimizing ingredient use. For example, use vegetable trimmings to make stocks or soups, repurpose leftover proteins in new menu items, and use parts of ingredients that are often discarded, such as beet greens or broccoli stems. This can reduce costs and increase sustainability.

✓ **Balance protein choices**

Proteins can be a significant cost in menu development. Choose a balance of proteins that are cost-effective while still meeting the clean eating criteria. For example, consider plant-based protein options, such as beans,

lentils, or tofu, which can be more cost-effective compared to animal proteins like seafood or organic meats.

✓ **Plan menu items creatively**

Plan menu items creatively to maximize the use of ingredients and minimize waste. For example, design menu options that use similar ingredients in different ways or create “build-your-own” style bowls or salads where customers can choose their ingredients from a set of options. This allows for flexibility and customization while minimizing food waste.

✓ **Offer customization with add-ons**

Instead of including all ingredients in the base menu item, offer customization options as add-ons. For example, offer different sauces, dressings, or toppings as add-ons that customers can choose for an additional cost. This allows for customization while giving customers control over their spending.

✓ **Educate customers**

Educate customers about the value of clean eating and the higher costs associated with using high-quality ingredients and following sustainable practices. Transparency about the ingredients, sourcing, and practices can justify higher

prices and create awareness among customers about the benefits of choosing clean eating options.

✓ **Optimize portion sizes**

Carefully manage portion sizes to avoid food waste and excessive costs. Offer appropriate portion sizes that meet nutritional needs without over-serving. This helps manage costs while promoting mindful eating and reducing food waste.

✓ **Seek partnerships and discounts**

Collaborate with local farmers, suppliers, or other businesses to seek partnerships or discounts on high-quality ingredients. Group purchasing or sourcing directly from farmers or producers may offer cost savings.

✓ **Monitor and adjust**

Regularly monitor and analyze the cost-effectiveness of the clean eating menu options. Identify areas for improvement, such as ingredient cost optimization, waste reduction, and process streamlining, and adjust accordingly.

Information above courtesy Tracy Stuckrath, thrive! meetings & events

“I think offering clean options for menus as an a la carte addition or menu swap is a gentler way to balance the cost increases,” DeFelices says. “Communication helps too! Explain your efforts for better ingredients and share where your foods come from. A price increase is a bit easier to swallow if it can be reasoned. Moving this needle is going to take time.”

When it comes to adding clean options to your menu, the sky’s the limit.

“There is simply no limit to what you can offer; the caveat is in the sourcing and preparation,” says Fenster.

Addressing consumer demand

The simple fact is that there is an increase in guests who want to eat clean, know where their food comes from, and get the nutrients they need, and this obviously provides a huge financial opportunity for caterers. According to another [IFIC survey](#), 64% of consumers surveyed said they try to choose foods made with clean ingredients, defined as “not artificial or synthetic,” “organic,” “fresh,” or “natural.” FMCG Gurus research indicates that 69% of U.S. consumers found clean label products appealing when described as “natural,” “synthetic-free,” “free from artificial ingredients,” and “containing real ingredients.”

Additionally, if your competition is not doing it, this is a great opportunity for you to set yourself apart. According to Gluten and Allergy-free Passport, guests with dietary needs are 91% more likely to return to vendors after a positive dining experience; and Certistar research shows there is an opportunity to grow your revenue by 60% by offering options that meet multiple needs across the catering menu.

From the beverage side of things, data shows that 30% of people do not drink



Fresh poached asparagus with turmeric hollandaise.
Photo courtesy Michael Fenster/Red Tail Productions

alcohol, according to Stuckrath. The non-alcoholic adult beverage market (which can be considered clean) is exploding and offers an opportunity to increase revenues by incorporating them into the menu—you can make more money on these than a can of soda.

The bottom line is clean eating offers your clients options.

“I think clean eating checks a lot of boxes for event attendees these days,” DeFelices says. “Clean eating gives you diversity of options. Weddings want decadence and corporate events want healthier foods, and as event guests trend younger and more culturally diverse, clean eating options are attractive on both menus. In the catering space, there are far more events that are looking for vegan and vegetarian options, as well as food allergies that we’ve never seen listed before. Why not celebrate that you are offering clean options on your inclusive menus.” 

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IN THE GLASS

By Amber Kispert



Black grape margaritas (black grapes, tequila, and sweetener mix). Photo courtesy of Table Grape Co.



The Frozen ZONE

Let's take a look at frozen cocktails: their popularity, the trends, and how to serve them

SUMMER MEANS OUTDOOR EVENTS, and what better way for your guests to chill outdoors than with a blended (aka frozen) cocktail in their hand? “Especially in warmer climates,” said Abigail Gullo (beverage director at Compère Lapin in New Orleans) in an [article for *Seven Fifty Daily* titled “The Future of Frozen Drinks”](#), “I think these drinks are great. They’re a continuing evolution of [the industry’s efforts] to take things that have historical context [but have gotten] mass produced and maligned and bring them back to their origins. I hope to see more of that, as well as more mixology that is similarly fun and playful in spirit.”

Although these refreshingly cool drinks are synonymous with summer, that doesn’t mean they can’t find a place on your bar menu any time of the year. Whether it’s on-premise or off-premise, they’re a great way to efficiently please larger crowds.

Let’s take a spin through the blended cocktail movement.

AZZURRO

YIELD: 1

Recipe and photo courtesy Cocktail.Vision2023©

INGREDIENTS

- 1½ oz Germana Soul Cachaca
- ½ oz overproof rum
- ¾ oz Blue Curacao
- ¾ oz coconut syrup
- ¾ oz fresh lemon juice
- ½ oz coconut water
- 1½ oz pineapple juice

METHOD

1. Combine all ingredients in a blender with half a cup of ice.
2. Blend until smooth.



A COOL

DID YOU KNOW that ancient Mesopotamia had frozen beverages (particularly made with honey)? Catherine de Medici brought a sort of frozen treat trend there.

Although the blended cocktail has hit their stride in the 1950s when

“The nostalgia factor of sno cones, molecular mixology and liquid nitrogen, and staffing that have played into the current popularity of frozen cocktails,” says the author of the [Cocktail](#) titled “An Ode to the Classic Daquiri.”

In 1979, the owners of a Ruston, Louisiana package store decided to combine a “Tequila Sunrise” mix. So, they decided to combine it with a frozen treat as they were checking out at the register—sort of like the [Cocktail](#) article.



HISTORY

...sopotamians made frozen drinks? According to [the article](#), the ancient Mesopotamian kings treasured (made with syrups and pomegranate). Additionally, the sorbet maker to England in the 1500s and started

...s been around for thousands of years, they really as blenders became widely available to consumers. ...s and other shaved ice treats, the increase in ...ng challenges in high volume bars are all factors ...zen drinks,” according to an [article for Tales of the](#)

...ge store found themselves unable to sell bottles of ...e the mix with shaved ice and offer it to customers ...ke candy for grown-ups, according to the Tales of

Turn a classic mango biche into a mango biche lemonade frappe (green mango, lime juice, lime zest, mint, and agave simple syrup). Photo courtesy National Mango Board



THE DESERT LILY

The official cocktail of Tales of the Cocktail 2022

YIELD: 1

Recipe courtesy Spencer Warren (Butcher and the Rye) for *Chilled Magazine*

Photo courtesy Lesley Jacobs Solmonson for *Chilled Magazine*

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Cana Brava Rum
1 oz aloe vera drink
¾ oz lime juice
¾ oz simple syrup
¾ oz Perfect Puree Prickly Pear
¾ oz lemon juice
2-3 drops Fee's Lavender Flower Water

METHOD

1. Add all ingredients into a blender with ice. Blend until a frozen slushy.
2. Pour into a large solo cup or collins glass. Top with an Amarena Fabbri Cherry.
3. If using a large machine, add water instead of ice for freezing.

Beyond the Blender

Most bartenders dread the blender. But, if you're able to plan ahead, you don't need one.

"A spur-of-the-moment drink either means using a blender, or a bag and a hammer," said beverage consultant and freelance spirit educator Philip Duff in an article for *Tales of the Cocktail*. "But, if you're prepared to plan ahead, you don't need much more equipment than a mixture of salt and water and then your drink, pre-diluted in a Ziploc bag or plastic tub."

By putting the bagged or otherwise-contained cocktail into the freezer, you'll get the cocktail to well below the freezing point. "But, it'll still be liquid," according to the article.

The idea here is that if you shake a cocktail with ice and strain the liquid, your drink is diluted and the rest of the ice is thrown away. But in a blended drink, everything that goes into the blender comes out of the blender.

Take the classic margarita. A typical margarita is 2-1-1 proportions of tequila, Cointreau, and lime, respectively. Shaking the ingredients in a traditional Boston with ice, you typically get about one more ounce of water, which totals a drink of five ounces. By accounting for that ounce of water in the frozen drink-in-a-bag method, you have a perfectly diluted drink.

"The water amount varies with each recipe because the goal is for the total alcoholic strength of the finished drink, including water, to be around 14.2%, but not more than 15%, alcohol by volume," says the article.

Blended drinks must be stronger and sweeter to combat dilution. But with the plastic bag method, you skip that hassle. Also, for taste, Duff recommends a drop or two of saline solution per cocktail.

Information above courtesy [Frozen Drinks Beyond the Blender](#)

A BLEND OF AND OLD

ALTHOUGH THE CLASSIC blended cocktails (daiquiris, margaritas, and piña coladas, etc.) continue to be popular go-to drinks to keep guests cool, today's blended cocktails "have come a long way from the mass-produced, neon-hued daiquiris of yesteryear—and they keep getting better," says the *Seven Fifty Daily* article.

Yelp has predicted that even more slushy drinks will be popping up all over the country with exciting new flavor combinations, according to an article for [Tasting Table](#). With a search

increase of 77%, it's time to try some frozen. One blended drink (primarily out East) is essentially just frozen. "They're really delicious" (Elegant Affairs) during a Special Event session. *Trends with Andre* is popular in the Harb. Slushy machines are a piece of catering equipment in serving.

Continued on page 98



Honey Peach Frappuccino (honey vanilla syrup, cold brew concentrate, whole milk, peach puree, and whipped cream). Photo courtesy National Honey Board

NEW

's clear consumers are looking for new concoctions.

that has started to trend recently is the “frosé,” which is frozen rosé wine.

“Delicious,” said Andrea Correale during her Catersource + The Confection (Culinary Inspiration & Confection by Andrea Correale), “and very, very important on the island.”

are also becoming an essential piece of equipment due to their ease



SPIRITED CHOCOLATE COVERED CHERRY MILKSHAKE

YIELD: 2

Recipe and photo courtesy Kathy Casey's Liquid Kitchen™

INGREDIENTS

- ½ oz Monin Dark Chocolate Sauce or other high quality thick chocolate sauce**
- 1 pt Ben & Jerry Cherry Garcia Ice Cream**
- 3 oz bourbon**
- ⅓ cup tart cherry pie filling**
- 2 ea. petite brownie bites or 1 ea. medium sized brownie**
- Chocolate Whipped Cream, for garnish (recipe below)**
- Bourbon-soaked maraschino cherries, for garnish (recipe below)**

METHOD

1. Swirl the chocolate sauce inside a chilled milkshake glass.
2. Spoon the ice cream into the blender. Pulse a few times until ice cream is broken up, then add bourbon, sour cherry pie filling and crumbled brownie. Pulse again until just barely combined.
3. Serve in chocolate-swirled glass, topped with a swirl of Chocolate Whipped Cream and a bourbon-soaked maraschino cherry.

METHOD FOR BOURBON-SOAKED MARASCHINO CHERRIES

Drain the liquid off of a jar of maraschino cherries; cover with bourbon. Let sit for at least 1 week before using.

INGREDIENTS FOR CHOCOLATE WHIPPED CREAM

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream**
- 1 oz Monin Dark Chocolate Sauce or other high quality thick chocolate sauce**

METHOD

1. Stir together whipping cream and chocolate sauce. Pour into an iSi Whipper. Screw on top and then charge with 1 iSi Cream (N2O) charger. Lightly shake whipper. Store refrigerated for up to five days.
2. Note: you can also whip cream with a whisk and then pipe from a piping bag or use a spoon to dollop on top of milkshakes.



BLENDED PEACH WHISKEY SOUR

YIELD: 2

Recipe and photo courtesy Kathy Casey's Liquid Kitchen™

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups ice
- 4 oz bourbon
- 1 ea. lemon, skin cut off, quartered
- 1 cup peaches (you can also substitute frozen, defrosted peaches if fresh are not available)
- 1½ oz simple syrup
- 2-3 bar spoons apricot jam

METHOD

1. In a blender, add the ice, bourbon, lemon, peaches, simple syrup, and apricot jam. Blend until the consistency is smooth.
2. Pour into two chilled small daiquiri or large glasses.
3. Garnish with fresh peach or edible flowers.



Frozen hot chocolate with both a waffle and a doughnut from Brancato's Catering. Photo courtesy Brancato's Catering

Continued from page 96

When adding blended cocktails to your menu, there are a few unique considerations that need to be considered, such as balancing ingredients and flavors.

“Frozen drinks can be really ‘temperamental’ and they ‘get ugly quickly in a glass’ if the ingredients separate,” says the article from *Seven Fifty Daily*.

It's also suggested to double the amount of sugar in frozen cocktails.

“Sugar is not bad,” Gullo said in the *Seven Fifty Daily* article. “You need more because of dilution and the water. Sugar is to a bartender what fat is to a chef—it helps to translate and amplify flavor.”

Check out these blended cocktail recipes to help keep your guests cool this summer.

“They can be tasty, with texture and different flavors,” said Jerry Nevins (Snow & Co.) in the *Seven Fifty Daily* article, “and what I love the most about frozen cocktails are the different sensations you get as they warm up on your palate.”

Cheers! 



FROSÉ

Recipe and photo courtesy Andrea Correale (Elegant Affairs Wedding & Events) for *Paste Magazine*

INGREDIENTS

- 1 bottle of rosé
- 3 oz of pink grapefruit juice
- 1 cup of simple syrup
- 2 cups of stemless strawberries

METHOD

1. Pour bottle of rosé into a sturdy container and freeze for eight hours.
2. Put frozen rosé in a blender with the pink grapefruit juice, simple syrup and strawberries. Pulse until you reach a slushy consistency and serve!

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Fresh ideas to use or adapt at your next event.

Keeping it Cool

There's nothing quite as "cool" as walking into an event to see a large ice display.

"Simply put, [clear] ice sculptures are beautiful, eye catching, and add an element of elegance to any event, large or small," says Dave Kustin with the Ice Butcher.

Ice sculptures can be incorporated into events in a variety of ways: a welcome showpiece can be used as a seating chart/list, functional food displays, centerpieces, and ice can even be the star of the signature cocktail through the uses of molds and different colors.

"Functional ice carvings, like seafood displays, continue to be very popular for events," says Kustin. "The trend we like seeing is the marriage of flowers and ice, which creates some of the most gorgeous ice products around. Further, cocktail ice with inclusions may be the most popular item we are getting requests for right now."

As beautiful as ice carvings can be, however, they can be a little tricky when it comes to logistics.

"While there are ways to 'hold' a sculpture at temperature prior to unveiling, you really can't keep them cold or at temperature once they are in the environment," Kustin says, "therefore the timing of the set-up is important. You want to maximize the amount of time guests will have to interact with the sculpture, but you also must consider the food displays, which add another element of timing as the staff will need time to display the food."

Check out these examples of ice carvings to inspire you for your next event. 

—Amber Kispert



(Two photos above) **During the Opening Night Party** guests could enjoy a "luge shot" where a margarita was poured into the top of a Day of the Dead themed ice sculpture before traveling down to a waiting shot glass | Catersource + The Special Event 2023. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



The Norwegian Prima
Norwegian Cruise Line
an onsite Icelandic ice sculpture (part of the ship) to showcase the ship's Creative. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



A Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs bar (during ACE-nominations Weekend) featured a large ice sculpture of Snow White (in honor of the 100th Anniversary of the Fairy Tale) | Detroit Area Catersource + The Special Event 2023. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



Gala-nominated event debuted
e's newest ship, and featured
sculptor (who carved a replica
se the art of Iceland | Viva
sy Viva Creative



A fairytale castle set the tone for the Detroit
Athletic Club's ACE-nominated "Back to the Club
Weekend" (themed "Life is a Fairy Tale") | Detroit
Athletic Club. Photo courtesy DAC Photography



(Two photos above) **A seafood buffet**
display carved out of ice | Catersource +
The Special Event 2022.
Photo courtesy WASIO Faces



Seven Dwarfs themed raw
nated "Back to the Club
"poisoned apple" carved
the event's theme, "Life is a
athletic Club. Photo courtesy



An ice cold ceviche station during an
international sales meeting | A00 Events.
Photo courtesy A00 Events



An ice bar with serve-yourself glasses of wine | Catersource + The Special Event 2021. Photo courtesy WTA Photo via SpotMyPhotos



An ice hors d'oeuvres display featuring individual "cubbies" for each bite | Catersource + The Special Event 2021. Photo courtesy WTA Photo via SpotMyPhotos



A massive ice carving during Rosemary Catering's 2020 ACE-nominated "Under the Big Top - A 95th Birthday Spectacular" featured whole fish and lobsters embedded within it and served as a vessel for Tuna Poke Cones and Ceviche Shakers, as well as a colossal paella. Photo courtesy Rosemary's Catering



Ice carvings during weddings can be customized with the couple's initials | The Ice Butcher. Photo courtesy the Ice Butcher



A very detailed carved fish accompanying a food display | Catersource + The Special Event 2021. Photo courtesy WTA Photo via SpotMyPhotos



A raw bar and ice sculpture welcomed guests to an event in 2021 | Detroit Athletic Club. Photo courtesy DAC Photography



A welcome showpiece depicts an octopus | The Ice Butcher. Photo courtesy the Ice Butcher



Ice carvings can also serve as event furniture, like this large ice bar | The Ice Butcher. Photo courtesy the Ice Butcher

AS SEEN IN... ORLANDO

DURING ART OF CATERING FOOD

By Amber Kispert

After a four-year hiatus, Art of Catering Food made its triumphant return this past March in Orlando, FL.

The two-day culinary education experience culminated with a tour of Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering's production and warehouse facility. The award-winning Orlando caterer (and member of the Leading Caterers of America) welcomed AOCF attendees with not one, not two, but four action stations (and plenty of samples of course) before giving a behind-the-scenes look at their operations. Their facility was truly a "site" to behold!

Base of operations

When Puff 'n Stuff purchased the facility in 2006, it housed a telecommunications company, so it truly served as a blank canvas for what a catering facility could be.

"This facility was built for our team truly," said Puff 'n Stuff Director of Sales Heidi Brice during the tour. "We wanted an easier place to work; a better place to work."

The 30,000 square foot facility houses linens, rental equipment, and its kitchens. Additionally, the loading area out back serves as the perfect location to load its fleet of catering trucks for event service. Lastly, the facility also houses in-house laundry service (for linens), and an impressive sanitation and dishwashing operation that utilizes a custom-built reverse osmosis system.

"It's The Disney World of catering," joked Brice during the tour. **CS**

All photos courtesy WASIO Faces unless otherwise noted



Puff 'n Stuff served hanging tomahawks (grilled in front of attendees) along with house made chips and local ales.



Florida Street Tacos featured flaked Florida grouper (in a custom spice blend), cilantro rice slaw, cilantro, cotija, and charred lime vinaigrette.



The "Health Nut" snack featured cauliflower, quinoa, brown rice, chicken, local herbs, almond butter, and caper dressing.



(Above and right) The Nitro featured chocolate and Pop



Featured carnival
rice, roasted
vegetables, and orange



The ever-popular cronut is rolled live in the Puff 'n Stuff's bakery every day, and topped with such ingredients as shaved dark chocolate, candied orange, salted caramel, milk chocolate, and house made marshmallow. During the Art of Catering Food visit, guests could choose from chocolate, orange, or vanilla and top their cronut with an assortment of add-ons including sprinkles, nuts, and crushed cookies.



Organ Popcorn Skewers
and Rocks.





Attendees were greeted at Puff 'n Stuff's facility with a welcome cocktail (orange juice, mango, and vodka).



Puff 'n Stuff utilizes its own linens for their events, which are stored in the facility's warehouse. During consultations, clients can peruse Puff 'n Stuff's "Linen Wall" to find the perfect fabric for their event. Upon completion of the event, linens are transported back to the facility where they are washed, dried, and pressed so they are ready for the next event.



Puff 'n Stuff's Orlando facility serves as both production and warehouse space. Photo courtesy Savannah Spirov



Puff 'n Stuff's President Tracy Vessillo (and Catersource + The Special Event 2023 Ambassador), far right, gave a thorough, educational tour of the catering facility to the Art of Catering Food attendees.



It's all in the family! Puff 'n Stuff owner Warren Dietel's sibling (Corporate Director of Sales Heidi Dietel Brice, far left) was instrumental in developing the AOCF tour.



Puff 'n Stuff's chefs and kitchen staff were on hand to answer questions about the kitchen and its culinary operations.

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By Kathryn Albarado



Editor's note: Kathryn Albarado recently retired as owner and president of Dagar's Catering, Austin, TX. Prior to Albarado, the business was owned by her father Albert Dagar. Albarado's grandfather Freddie Dagar founded the catering company in 1952.

Changing of the Guard

Business is business. Family is family. Try to explain that to an entrepreneur who has sacrificed time, health, money, vacations, and relationships among other things.

How do you remove the emotions from business?

The truth is, I don't know if you fully can or want to, but there is a balance that needs to be found. For generational entrepreneurs (like me), they intertwine. Sometimes the only thing that keeps the engine running is the emotions. Generational entrepreneurs thrive in emotionally challenging atmospheres.

Fresh out of college, I went into the family business with guns blazing. It was time to prove myself! My ill-conceived perception, aka my twenty-something ego, was that I knew better than dad (the boss). My know-it-all attitude would cause countless disagreements and battle of wills. Technology was moving faster than most businesses could keep up with. Times were changing and the generational struggle was real.

In 2003, I suggested that it was time for a website. The boss felt that there was no need for this expense since everyone uses the phonebook. Since I was daddy's little girl, I knew what buttons to push. Finally, he caved in and provided me with a \$500 budget to build our first website (or should I say splash page).

Wait. The story doesn't end there. I proceeded to tell him that we needed to attend [Catersource Conference & Tradeshow](#). His immediate response is "what are they going to teach me that I don't already know?" Again, I got my way and took my reluctant boss to the conference.

Let me paint a picture for you: While sitting in the conference room, the speaker walks in and says, "Good morning! I know everyone here has a website, right?"

My dad immediately responds: "It is going to be a long week for me, isn't it?"

I told him, "Of course, it is."

Although we experienced the 'aha' moment at the conference, there was still a continuous power struggle between the two of us. He wanted me to succeed, but he didn't know how to nurture growth without struggle. In his mind, being tough was going to make me tough and prepare me for whatever was thrown in my direction. He did succeed in preparing me, but looking back I wish we could have done it with less friction. When the "changing of the guard" took place it didn't come from a place of want but a place of necessity. Dad was terminally ill. At this point it didn't matter what we agreed or disagreed on; our egos needed to be set aside to ensure the future of our company would last beyond his death.

At 32 years of age, I became the sole person responsible for the legacy of our family business. With this came a whirlwind of emotions and challenges which led to my ultimate self-discovery journey because who was I if I wasn't "Albert Dagar's daughter?" Through this experience, I found my purpose in helping other generational entrepreneurs reimagine their future and well-being by finding balance and purpose in their daily lives. I am Kathryn Albarado, the daughter of Albert Dagar, who through it all prepared me for the future. 

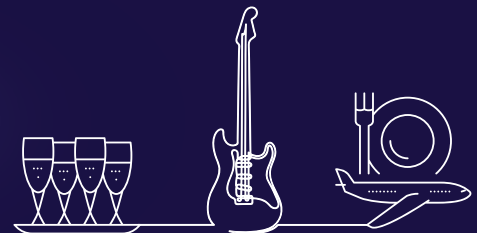
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EXCLUSIVE: How activations are rocking the event world (p. 36)
Event company spotlight & mid-year trend predictions (p. 48)

SPECIAL EVENTS

SUMMER 2023

SUMMER *Inspiration*

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NET ZERO**
p. 20

**FOOD TRENDS
YOUR CLIENTS
WANT THIS YEAR**
p. 58

**A BIT OF COASTAL
FIESTA FLAIR**
p. 90



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Highlighting event companies and their trend predictions for 2023



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A glammed up “living fountain” dripping in pearls (by Key Artist Group) created quite the wow factor at this year’s Catersource + The Special Event Closing Night Celebration in Orlando, FL. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

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CS+TSE thanks our sponsors for a spectacular event



EDITOR'S PAGE

ADDICTED TO THE SHINDIG

It has been three months since we closed the books on Catersource + The Special Event 2023 in beautiful Orlando, FL. From all accounts, the week was uplifting, positive, and full of mind-opening thoughts for business building, no matter where you position yourself in the events and/or catering industry. We have done a lot of recapping online at specialevents.com and I hope you've had a chance to [check it out](#). If not, more inspiration from the show awaits you inside this issue!

But, as we are most certainly "addicted to the shindig," we have already begun planning for 2024 and our industry week in Austin, TX February 12–15, 2024. Read more about it in Conference News, starting on page 8. I certainly enjoyed my site visit and first-ever trip to Austin, and I look forward to seeing you all there early next year.

One of the most important topics of discussion at our March 2023 CS+TSE event was regarding sustainability. From our own corporate efforts throughout the four days to sessions touching on various aspects thereof, sustainability continues to drive the conversation. In this issue, content editor Amanda Nicklaus looks at reducing and offsetting carbon emissions and how even "baby steps" can create change. Turn to page 20 to start your read.

Another great takeaway from our show: food trends. You may be in event planning and execution, but every event is better with the right food options. What do your clients want in 2024? Turn to page 58 to find out.

With a solid piece on brand activations (page 36) and a comprehensive list of prominent event companies and the trends they are seeing as we approach mid-year (page 48), this issue has a lot to offer.

Finally, for any Red Hot Chili Pepper fans, I hope you recognized that the title of this note is part of the lead line from their two-decades-old song, *Can't Stop*. For the casual listener, the song lyrics are hard to decipher, or are there to mainly fill in a rhythm. But listen closely (says the wordsmith writing this piece): the overarching theme is that you must live your life with passion, purpose, and individuality. Because, as Anthony Kiedis sings as the song closes, "This life is more than just a read-through."

Everywhere you can look, there is beauty and inspiration to be found. Thank goodness that our profession is one that embraces passion, talent, and creativity in a way that also allows us to be rewarded for our efforts. Enjoy this summer issue, and may you find inspiration within!

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr

Director of Community & Content Strategy

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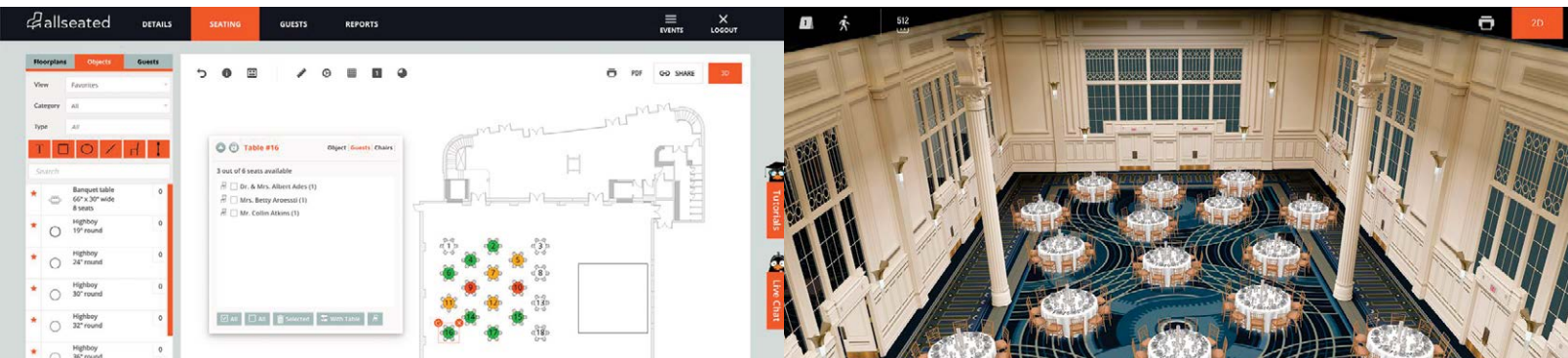


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Christie Osborne
discusses analytics
strategies



Tech professional
Nora Sheils talks
tech solutions for
long-lasting business



Wedding PR and
marketing consultant
Meghan Ely breaks
down self-auditing for
business sustainability



Event director and
licensed therapist
Chaessa Sawyer
discusses mental
health for planners

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CONFERENCE NEWS

by Kathleen Stoehr

Austin Convention Center,
where the 2024 CS+TSE
Conference & Tradeshow will
be held, February 12–15. Photo
courtesy Jerry Hayes



Conference updates

Catersource + The Special Event: Next stop — Austin, TX!

The team at Catersource + The Special Event is deep into planning for a week of stellar learning, networking, and opportunity next February 12–15, 2024 in Austin, TX, a walkable city with tremendous restaurants, cozy cocktail bars, inviting event venues, and accommodating hotel properties. Core team members visited the first week of May to explore the possibilities, with the help of [Visit Austin](#).

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The venues

Beyond the **Austin Convention Center**, where the conference and tradeshow will take wing, the team toured a variety of potential event spaces. They included:

Austin City Limits Live at The Moody Theater on Willie Nelson Boulevard – This is the permanent home of the acclaimed Austin PBS produced television series, *Austin City Limits*, the longest running music series in American television history and also the first mixed-occupancy building of its type in the world to be LEED certified. Three levels offer 2,700+ capacity with an outside plaza and mezzanine gallery of historical ACL music photos that dazzle.

Palmer Events Center on Barton Springs Road – With an incredible view of the downtown Austin skyline, this venue ticks all the boxes for a memorable evening event. Covered outdoor canopy space abutting Butler Park, quiet indoor spaces and covered balconies, and a large hall for activations inside. It's a stunning space, but...is the elevator haunted?

Superstition on Riverside Drive – An elite multi-room nightclub channels the energy of the 1970s, with 12,000 square feet of elevated space, a cocktail lounge, the “Gold Room,” and patio area. It's a stunner of a venue, and very new to the Austin area.

Banger's Austin on Rainey Street – Indoor, outdoor, and outdoor-covered options in a casual setting with a basement speakeasy as well as over 200 beers on tap always. Live fire cooking, plenty of seating, nooks for quiet conversation, and walking distance from

the convention center make this a solid choice for an event.

Speakeasy on Congress Avenue – Located in the historic Kreisle Building, the old bones of this building come to life in three levels: Music lounge; bowling mezzanine; and the Ballroom, the Kabaret Room, and the rooftop lounge. Apparently, another spirit haunts this establishment as well. Wooooooo!

800 Congress on Congress Avenue – This smaller venue in downtown Austin showcases views of the Capitol, an open warehouse look with exposed brick that's industrial, yet polished, and is A/V ready.

Copper Tank Event Center & Micheladas Café y Cantina on Trinity Street – A private venue in the heart of downtown within walking distance of the convention center,



The second level of Superstition features comfortable seating overlooking the first floor bar area. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



Lyle Lovett & His Large Band perform during an *Austin City Limits* taping at Austin City Live at Moody Theater on August 24, 2022 in Austin, Texas. photo courtesy of Gary Miller/Getty Images

Palmer Events Center offers a dramatic nighttime look. Photo courtesy Thomas McConnell



The entrance to Banger's is situated on the popular Rainey Street. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



Copper Tank is attached to Micheladas, with a wide variety of spaces, from rooftop patios, to walk up street counters, a full kitchen, courtyard, and plenty of seating.

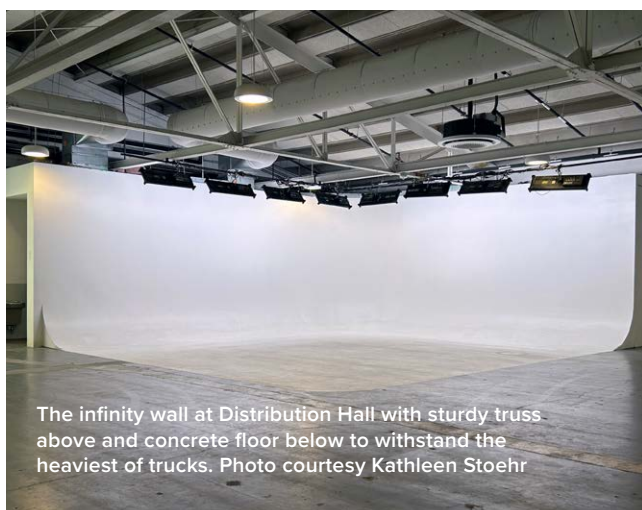
Antone's on Fifth Street – Downstairs concert hall marries upstairs event space for an intimate venue that celebrates the blues. An adjacent record shop and entry foyer featuring an antique shoeshine stand imbue loads of charm.

Bullock Texas State Museum on Congress Avenue – For those who love the grandeur and history that museums bring to any event, the Bullock is a real treat. The plaza outside plus first floor rotunda with soaring spiral staircase are already dressed up and ready for an elegant night. Additional levels overlook the rotunda to create memorable experiences.

Distribution Hall on 4th Street – This mid-century structure features a studio warehouse with infinity wall, an open-air hangar, and a gorgeous 7,000 square foot courtyard and lawn with a gnarly old pecan tree towering over it majestically. Load-bearing truss and solid concrete floors inside can accommodate just about anything you'd want to showcase at an event.

Central Library on Cesar Chavez Street – Even the Uber driver gushed about this property as he dropped off his charges. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook Lady Bird Lake, a covered patio area for arrivals is large enough for activations, and pre-function space, coat-check room, and green room is included in the rental.

The infinity wall at Distribution Hall with sturdy truss above and concrete floor below to withstand the heaviest of trucks. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



Deviled eggs with fermented cabbage, smoked trout roe, and grated ham at Fixe Southern House. Photo courtesy Fixe Southern House



The cuisine

Establishments touting various types of barbecue are rampant in the city. Being as Lockhart, TX, just 30 minutes away, is considered the epicenter of barbecue in the entirety of Texas, the nearby capital city of Austin benefits greatly from proximity. Tex-Mex, southern emphasis, old school, a little bit of New Orleans, and a whole lot of deep fry categorize much of the offerings (and there are many) in the capital city of Austin.

Probably the most famous of the barbecues is **Franklin**, which started in Aaron and Stacy Franklin's backyard, moved to a small trailer in 2009, and today has fed everyone from Jimmy Kimmel to President Barack Obama. Aaron Franklin won a James Beard Award for Best Chef in 2015 and was inducted into the American Royal Barbecue Hall of Fame in 2020.

Most recently, Aaron Franklin and partner Chef Tyson Cole opened **Loro**, an Asian smokehouse featuring grilled and smoked meats with Southeast Asian and Japanese-inspired sauces. Keep that thought in your head, people—there may be a class at Catersource 2024 (available to those who purchase a CS or All Access pass), focusing on this very topic—how companionable Texas barbecue and Asian flavors truly are. Who will be teaching it? Stay tuned!

Near the convention center, **Moonshine Comfort & Cocktails** offers classic American comfort food in a charming setting. In the basement (Wednesday through Saturday after 5:00 p.m.) you will find **Kinfolk**: a historic cellar built in the 1850s. Now an award-winning 20-seat bar, Kinfolk features a refined list of cocktails bolstered by a unique collection of spirits. Reservations required.

At **ATX Cocina**, modern Mexican rules the menu with sharable plates highlighting masa, pequenos, and crudo, all crafted in a completely gluten-free kitchen. Highlights include brussels sprouts with spiced agave vinaigrette, huarache, burrata y fresca, and enfrijolada with poblano ricotta.

Banger's on Rainey Street is all about the beer (over 200 types always on tap) and sausage. Sausages are made on site, as well as house-made pickles, and sauerkraut, too. All quality food, made from scratch.

Finally, at **Fixe Southern House**, order the Fixe biscuits with fruit preserves and organic Texas honey, deviled eggs with smoked trout roe, and shrimp and grits to share at the table. Add in lobster and crawfish pot pie, fried chicken, and beet salad to finish and you will leave stuffed and happy.



Fried green tomatoes with smoked shrimp, tomatillo aioli, and pimento at Moonshine. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



Crudo from ATX Cocina. Photo courtesy ATX Cocina



Sweet corn hush puppies with Fixe hot sauce and charred corn tartar sauce at Fixe Southern House. Photo courtesy Fixe Southern House



The Keynote Stage at Catersource +The Special Event 2023 hyped up attendees with theatrical performances. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



What could be better than a mobile DJ booth operating out of the VW van from the Florida Sunshine Tour CS+TSE '23 theme? Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

The February 2024 schedule of happenings

Monday, February 12th: Industry associations and groups will hold everything from board meetings to full day thought leadership gatherings. Venue tours for event professionals will start in the afternoon and a culinary tour for catering professionals is also in the planning stages. As day moves to night, Catersource + The Special Event will open the doors on its Connect Social (formerly Connect Live) evening event, a chance for those already checked in and ready to engage and kick off the week.

It's a great evening, spirits are high, and the week is wide open with possibility for networking and interaction.

Tuesday, February 13th: Catersource + The Special Event opens, with a conference-only first day and an opening night event. Its sister media brand, MeetingsNet, also returns with conference sessions geared directly to the meeting planner audience (available to those who purchase a TSE or All Access pass).

After the conference closes for the day, groups such as International Caterers Association Educational Foundation (ICAEF) will celebrate its scholarship recipients in a private gathering; various exhibitors will host invitation-only events; and then the evening will culminate in the Opening Night Party, with more details to follow in our fall issue or online at <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>.

Wednesday, February 14th: An Opening General Session launches a full day of activity on the exhibit hall floor (open 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) including conference sessions on the Ignite and Culinary stages. There will, as always, be hundreds of exhibitors to visit, experience, and learn from, and activations to enjoy.

In the afternoon, additional sessions in conference rooms begin at 1:00 p.m. and end at 5:00 p.m.

Later in the evening the annual Special Event Assistance, Relief & Crisis Help (SEARCH) Foundation fundraiser will bring like-minded people together to raise money through auction for those in need. A spectacular charitable event, *Special Events* is a proud donor and hopes to see you there!

Thursday, February 15th: Always known to go big on its last day, Catersource + The Special Event will offer a 9:00 a.m. Closing General Session that will inspire you, another full day of exhibit hall browsing and buying (10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.), more conference education, and then it's time to celebrate! You'll start the night off with the "Oscars" of the catering and events industry: An elaborate awards ceremony featuring the ACE, CATIE, Leadership, and Gala awards with heartwarming awards presentation for work exceptionally well done (see page 14 for more information on the Gala awards).



The Event Escape rooms are a great place for activities, like this leathercrafting station in the Austin, TX room from this year's Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



CS+TSE evening showcasing events are always Instagrammable! Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Paulina Corvi presented go-to business best practices from her decade-long experience working at J.P. Morgan Private Bank before becoming a luxury destination wedding planner. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



DAVID MERRELL PRESENTS: *Current Trends in the Events Industry* was a popular session at this year's CS+TSE. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

After that, join award recipients and exhibitors, sponsors, speakers, and attendees for one last industry week hurrah as we say farewell at our Closing Night Celebration.

All the other good stuff

Registration: Registration opens in August! Super Early Bird rates will be in effect so you can take advantage of the lowest prices available. Go to <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/> for more information.

Call for Speakers: Our call for session speakers closes in late June and the full educational schedule will launch mid-fall of 2023. Stay tuned as we start teasing out sessions and speakers in our fall issue, out September 30th.

Call to Arms!

If you would like to be a part of the planning committee for any of CS+TSE's evening Showcasing Events, a Call to Arms will be held soon. You can also express your interest to Show Manager, **Jesse Parziale**, at jesse.parziale@informa.com. **Watch the websites or our weekly e-newsletters for more information.**



(Left) Pre-awards entertainment set the tone for a sophisticated evening at the ACE, CATIE & Gala awards ceremony. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

(Right) Kristin Banta was awarded Designer of the Year at the Gala awards ceremony in Orlando, FL. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



And the Award Goes To...

It's once again time to celebrate the best of the best! Nominations are now being accepted for the *Special Events* 2024 Gala awards! We invite you to submit your best work from the past year (see eligibility period below). Join in the excitement and the spirit of our industry as we celebrate the hard work and exceptional accomplishments of our peers.

Here are the categories:

Best Entertainment:

Budget \$100,000 and above

Best Entertainment:

Budget under \$100,000

Best Event for a Private Individual:

Budget \$1,000 and above per guest

Best Event for a Private Individual:

Budget under \$1,000 per guest

Best Event Produced for a Corporation or Association:

Overall Budget over \$500,000

Best Event Produced for a Corporation or Association:

Overall Budget under \$500,000

Best Fundraising or Nonprofit Event

Best Multiple-Day Event Program for a Corporation or Association

Best Wedding: Budget \$1,000 and above per guest

Best Wedding: Budget under \$1,000 per guest

Designer of the Year

Micro Event of the Year

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Self-Auditing Your Systems & Processes for Sustainability



If you want to establish a sustainable foundation for your business, you'll need to check in on your systems and processes regularly.

By Meghan Ely

When you start a business, you have the time to ensure everything falls into place. But as your company grows and you attract more customers, it's easy to let parts of your business fall into disrepair. Suddenly, the processes that supported five clients no longer work to serve 20. Or perhaps your financial systems aren't sustainable as you reach and exceed six figures in revenue.

In other words, your business structure isn't a matter of setting and forgetting. Instead, it requires regular maintenance to build a resilient company that is here to stay.

If you can't remember the last time you worked on your business, you're long overdue for an operational tune-up. To get started, follow these tips for self-auditing your systems and processes to start seeing increased efficiency and faster growth.

THINK BIGGER THAN BUSINESS

Before diving into the technicals, such as your sales workflow or marketing plan, take a moment to look inward and reflect on how you're feeling about your business.

"Ask yourself: Are you happy?" encourages Jen Sulak of Weirdo Weddings. "I don't think we stop long enough to ask ourselves if we are happy in our businesses or where the business is going."

If your answer isn't an enthusiastic "yes," consider "what isn't making you happy versus what is," Sulak says.

"Detail out a quick list of things on your mind, and then let yourself get into the flow state to figure out a solid plan after the brainstorming."

Starting with your happiness is an essential first step in a self-audit. After all, fixing outdated systems and updating processes won't solve the bigger problem if you don't enjoy what you do.

TRACK YOUR TIME

Next, you'll want to consider how you spend your time. If you feel unmotivated to start your workday, it's often due to the misallocation of time to unfulfilling tasks. When you're spending too much time on mundane to-dos, you aren't able to invest as much energy into high-impact work that actually moves the needle.

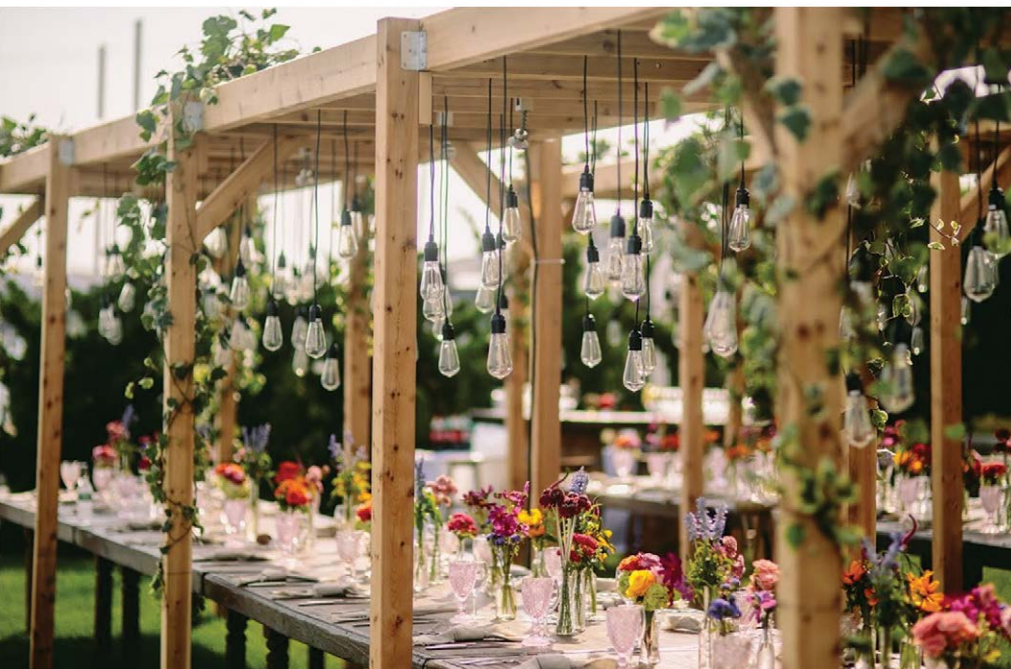
"When you are aware of how long it takes you to do something, it helps you to plan better," assures Alicia Igess Jones, business owner and hair stylist. "If something isn't working, it's better to self-assess or audit the situation in order to be more efficient and effective."

Instead, for the next week, "Track how much time you spend on every task—from sending emails to following up with past-due invoices to posting on social media," suggests Nora Sheils of Rock Paper Coin and Bridal Bliss. "These are all tedious tasks, but very important that they are done and done well."

There are many crucial responsibilities in a business, but that doesn't mean they all need to

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BUSINESS OF EVENTS

If you can't remember the last time you worked on your business, you're long overdue for an operational tune-up.

fall on your plate. Instead, adopt new practices that allow you to lessen the burden, like delegating tasks to your team or leveraging automation to take over the busy work.

REVIEW YOUR WEBSITE

While it's wise to audit marketing channels like social media, digital ads, and emails, don't forget the most important piece of your online presence: your website.

"Your website is your most important marketing tool and is a huge part of your inquiry funnel," confirms Adrienna McDermott of Ava and the Bee. "This should be looked at every six months and updated with new galleries every four months."

All roads lead to your website, so don't let it fall into a state of decay. But beyond marketing, McDermott adds a reminder that "SEO optimization is essential."

"You need keywords throughout, meta titles and descriptions, alt text, and a well-laid-out website to convert traffic to leads," she notes. "One of the biggest mistakes I see [event] professionals make is having too many images that are not compressed and take too long to load. A slow-loading website will not rank as well as a fast one!"

Take advantage of free tools like Google's PageSpeed Insights and Moz Keyword Explorer to confirm your website is in good shape. If not, consult with your web developer to identify opportunities for improvement.

CREATE A PLAN TO IMPLEMENT

What's an audit without a plan? There's no point in spending valuable time identifying growth opportunities in your business if you don't intend to pursue them.

Follow the advice of Jacqueline Vizcaino of Tinted Events Design and Planning: "Take the time to review the results of the audit and create a plan of action to address any issues that have been identified. Once any issues or potential problems have been identified, take the necessary steps to address them."

But before you turn that laundry list of to-dos into a persistent case of burnout, ensure your implementation plan is realistic and doable.

"Avoid overwhelming yourself by focusing on the areas that require immediate attention," Sheils cautions. "You don't need to overhaul all your processes overnight. Instead, develop a timeline and take it one step at a time."

Start with the updates that will have the most impact, whether giving much-needed attention to your software or adjusting existing workflows to fit your team's needs.

SCHEDULE REGULAR SELF-AUDITS

When all is said and done, give yourself kudos for taking the time to address your business's weaknesses. But if you want to establish a sustainable foundation for your

business, you'll need to check in on your systems and processes regularly.

"Self-audits should be done quarterly for your business," notes Corina Beczner of Vibrant Events. "If you want to audit your events and report to your clients the success, you should do that as part of your post-event follow-up."

Get in the habit of constant evaluation, looking for better solutions and new ideas around every corner. When you operate with a growth mindset, progress will come naturally.

And perhaps most importantly, "Don't be afraid of changes," Sulak adds. "Some of the best ideas and dreams come from examination, brainstorming, and the hard work behind the scenes to give you peace of mind as you walk-out your path!" Self-reflection is an integral part of growing a sustainable business. So, if you're hoping to create a legacy that lasts a lifetime, get comfortable asking the hard questions and always take the chance to improve! ●

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.

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A look at how to
carbon emission

By Amand

Sustainability is a topic that conversations evolve, plan ways to reduce the impact major element of creating emissions, commonly referred to

In their session *Saved by Z* + The Special Event (held in Or sustainability consultants Suz defined net zero as the “bal

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Net Zero

Reduce and offset emissions from events

by Anna Nicklaus

Net zero continues to grow in popularity, yet as event planners are looking for more concrete ways to reduce emissions from events, one of the most sustainable events is to offset carbon emissions as “net zero.”

Net zero at this year’s Catersource Summit (held in Orlando this past March), says Anne Morrell and Natalie Lowe, is the balance between [the] amount of carbon that’s produced and the amount that’s offset from the atmosphere.” This

equation: emissions minus offsets (which is the net offset emissions).

Events contribute to the production of carbon, a greenhouse gas that is a major factor to climate change and the rapid warming of the planet.

To create net zero, event planners must offset their carbon emissions enough



The Pledge

transportation, energy, food waste, and general waste. Travel to and from events, energy used to sustain events, food thrown out at the end of events, and consumer waste—things like carpet, swag, and unrecycled plastic—all contribute to excess carbon emissions, which is why responsible event production takes these factors into account and works to counteract them.

In November 2021, world leaders got together at COP26, the World Climate Summit, and formed [Net Zero Carbon Events](#), an initiative to address climate change through the offsetting of event-created carbon emissions. The goal is to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, in line with the Paris Agreement.

The Net Zero Carbon Events Pledge was launched with over 100 events industry stakeholders pledging to do their part in reducing carbon emissions.

Several big event industry players have signed the pledge, including Informa, the host company for Catersource + The Special Event, and IMEX, a major events and meetings tradeshow. In fact, IMEX released a report last year showing that

their 2021 IMEX America Event achieved a 100% offset of carbon emissions created by the Las Vegas Convention Center.

Informa has taken major strides to offset and reduce carbon emissions, including diligently tracking the sustainability of each event they produce and publishing the results in an [annual sustainability report](#).

“Catersource + The Special Event are committed to providing both a sustainable and inclusive environment for everyone attending our event,” says Tina Johanson, VP of Event Delivery at Informa Connect (a division of Informa). “We challenge ourselves every year to make sure we’re maintaining and exceeding what was done in the past. We’re thrilled to receive a perfect score from Informa’s sustainability group two years in a row.”



The tradeshow floor at Catersource + The Special Event doesn't use carpeting, which reduces waste and emissions post-show. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces

How to reduce carbon emissions

So, what is a planner to do? It can be overwhelming trying to work against the systems in place, but Morrell and Lowe suggest measuring your estimated current carbon emissions to get a baseline. Then, you can reduce the emissions at their source, and measure the actual amount of carbon emissions your event created.

Transportation

It's no secret that travel to and from events is a major creator of carbon production. There's also the element of shipping supplies to and from the destination. According to the EPA, transportation accounts for about 27% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

How to reduce transportation carbon emissions:

- Use Google flights to see how much CO2 your attendees will create by flying
- Keep events local and limit the amount of travel occurring within the event
- Provide carpool options for attendees
- Encourage sustainable transportation for attendees; provide resources and options
- Go hybrid when possible. For example, use VR technology for venue tours to reduce transportation between venues

Energy

"Energy is exactly like real estate; it depends on where it's located," said Lowe. Meaning: your energy impact depends on the system of the city your event is in, as well as the specific venue. Different municipalities have different building codes, transportation systems, and ways of dealing with waste. The best way to navigate this? Lowe encourages making friends with the city's DMO. They'll be familiar with everything planners need to know to create a sustainable event in their location. Lowe also suggests forming a relationship with the city manager—some cities are beginning to create specific roles for sustainability coordinators with the intention of having a point of contact for navigating these requests.

Other ways to reduce carbon emissions created by energy use:

- Work with **LEED-certified venues**. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the **most widely used green building rating system** in the world
- Switch to LED lighting
- Plan outdoor events when possible



Food Waste

"If food loss and waste were a country, it would rank number three in the GHG emissions, right after the U.S. and China," said Morrell during the *Saved by Zero* session. Production,



Just Do It!

Natalie Lowe founded The Sustainable Events Forum (TSEF), which is helping the events industry become sustainable. In 2021, TSEF worked with the Canadian Society of Professional Event Planners (CanSPEP), an association of independent planners who own their businesses, to make their annual conference more sustainable.

TSEF worked with the conference committee to reduce transportation emissions and reduce food and beverage waste. They also worked with Explore Waterloo Region, the DMO of the conference destination, to both educate them on sustainability assistance and incorporate the DMO's local suppliers into the event.

"Two years post event, I am delighted to say that Explore Waterloo Region...has gone on to incorporate sustainability in their sales presentations and indeed, they have won business due to their sustainability initiatives, which started with the CanSPEP conference," Lowe told *Special Events*.

"My advice to other planners is to make the first call and ask, 'Can you help me?'" Lowe says on finding support for your sustainability goals. "Not everyone will say 'yes', but many will—and you will both grow and benefit from these connections. We need to stop talking about climate aligned events and just do them."



The CanSPEP 2021 conference worked with a reusable container company to replace disposable food packaging. Photo courtesy Explore Waterloo Region



transportation, and handling of food contribute to carbon emissions; uneaten food decomposes in landfills and releases methane, an even stronger GHG than carbon.

According to a [report by Hubspot](#) about food waste in events, the average event in the UK and Ireland wastes 15 to 20% of the food it produces. That number is thought to be higher in the U.S.

To reduce carbon emissions from food waste:

- Use services like [CarbonCloud](#) or [Rock and Wrap It Up](#) to calculate your footprint
- Minimize excess food from the start through accurate measurement and clear communication (between catering team, attendees, client, etc.)
- Donate leftover food to local organizations for redistribution
- Provide organics waste removal for composting food waste
- Work with a caterer who practices sustainable sourcing, food waste diversion, and uses biodegradable or reusable materials for dinnerware and food station setup

General Waste

It's no secret that events are notorious for creating large amounts of waste. Signage, informational printouts, swag, carpeting, décor—everything used to create a great event is often also disposed of after the event is over. Finding net zero for waste-generated carbon emissions really goes back to the basics:

- Reduce. Eliminating waste from the start is the best place to begin. This can look like offering digital vs printed options, finding accurate number estimates to eliminate excess, avoiding plastic, and switching to reusable, recyclable, or compostable material whenever possible.
- Reuse. Re-evaluate the material you're obligated to use by choosing material with a long lifespan that can be used repeatedly for multiple events.
- Recycle. According to a blog from Sustain Life titled *Calculating Carbon Emissions from Waste*, not only is

recycling better for the environment, but it's more cost efficient, too. "It costs 48% less to recycle one ton of material compared to sending it to a landfill or the incinerator," says the article. Make sure that you provide clear recycling options and instructions for attendees, and research local recycling guidelines so that you and your staff can optimize the amount of properly disposed material.

In the session *Talkin' Trash: A Candid Conversation about Zero Waste*, Chef Paul Buchanan discussed the importance of proper waste disposal. "70% of what goes into the recycling container at any of your homes and any of your businesses is all straight to the landfill, because you put it in the wrong things, or those products can't be recycled," he told attendees. Learning how to eliminate waste from the start, reuse products, and properly dispose of final waste is a great place to focus on eliminating carbon emissions at your events.



Using digital signage, like the one shown here at this year's Catersource + The Special Event, is a way to cut back on paper waste and reduce carbon emissions. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



It's a common misconception that simply using carbon offsets can help you reach net zero carbon emissions.

According to the [International Emissions Trading Association \(IETA\)](#), "an offset represents the reduction, removal or avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions, measured in tons of CO2 equivalent." These actions "generate the greatest emissions reductions in the least time at the lowest cost." In simpler terms, an offset is an activity that removes current or future carbon.

These are the measures you'll take to counteract the carbon you can't help producing at your events. Offsets can be actions like planting trees for reforestation or utilizing systems like wind or solar power in place of fossil fuel energy.

While buying into offset programs might sound like the easiest way to counteract your carbon footprint, it's best to exercise caution around these programs, as there are many scam offset programs out there, often collecting money for phony environmental actions (also known as *greenwashing*).

In her session *Saved by Zero* at this year's Catersource + The Special Event, sustainability consultant Natalie Lowe recommended doing your research before investing in an offset; interview them, and make sure they're certified by the [United Nations Carbon Offset program](#).

You can also use [Impactful Ninja's guide to buying offsets](#) that actually make a difference.

Carbon offsets are a great way to counteract the carbon emissions you can't eliminate, just make sure to do your due diligence!



What is the Paris Agreement?

The [United Nations Climate Change website](#) defines the Paris Agreement as “a legally binding international treaty on climate change.”

The goal of this agreement, signed by approximately 195 countries, is to keep the “increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C (35.6° F) above pre-industrial levels” (levels before the industrial revolution) and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C (34.7° F) above pre-industrial levels.”

Besides keeping the earth’s temperature stable, the Paris Agreement also aims to reduce global GHG emissions by 50% by 2030.

Under this agreement, countries will report on their progress every five years, with 2024 expected to be the first year of reporting.

The Paris Agreement acts as the guiding light for the Net Zero Carbon Events Initiative.

Take the pledge!
All companies in the
events industry can
participate in the initiative.
All you need to do is fill
out this form.

Taking the next steps

At COP27 in November 2022, the Net Zero Carbon Events Initiative launched its [Roadmap](#), mapping out the next action steps: eight workstreams (measurement, reporting, carbon offsetting, venue energy, production and waste, food and food waste, logistics, travel and accommodations) to focus on in 2023.

Charlie McCurdy, then-CEO of Informa Markets, spoke on the event: “Collectively, we bring together one and a half billion business decision-makers every year across virtually all industries around the world. Our events have an estimated total economic impact per year of 1.5 trillion U.S. dollars. The exhibition industry is a catalyst for change.”

Even if it seems as if your events don’t produce that much carbon, each event is part of the larger events industry that can use its size to gain momentum in creating change and reducing total carbon emissions.

Moving forward as an event professional

With so many places to start and such a strong sense of urgency, it can be overwhelming making changes for sustainability in your own business. Yet, picking one area of focus—reaching net zero carbon emissions—doesn’t have to be stressful.

“You need to stop trying to make those [measurements] perfect because right now perfection in this area is hindering our advancement,” said Lowe. “People are so concerned about measuring everything that we’re measuring nothing.” Don’t look at how many plastic bottles your event uses, she encouraged—just focus on the big areas you can change. Then slowly zoom in.

Lowe and Morrell suggest breaking your process into five steps: gather data, calculate the emissions, look at your results, figure out what to improve next time, and focus on wins and opportunities.

Another tip? Don’t go at it alone. “It’s really important to communicate this out so the rest of us learn from you, and that’s something I think people are wary about in our event world, because we want to keep all the secrets to ourselves,” said Morrell. “We don’t want to let anyone know, but in this case, you do want to let people know, so that next time, when someone else is doing something similar to you, the data is there.”

Lowe and Morrell recommend starting small and focusing on consistency over intensity. Like everything else, working toward net zero carbon emissions is a journey, one that will take trial and error to get right. The important thing is to start, no matter how imperfectly.

“We can do this,” said Morrell. “The tools are out there.” ●

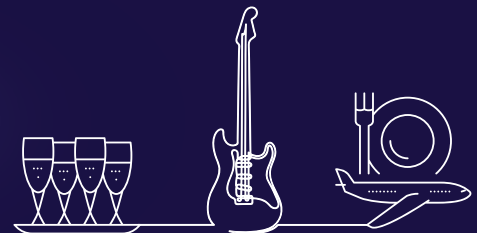
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Speaker Salute!

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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. **We salute them here:**

Alan Berg, Wedding
Business Solutions LLC

Alan Katz, Great
Officiants

**Alexandra
Schrecengost**, Culture
with Us

Alexis Amato, Manifest
with Alexis

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Colleen Hauk, The Corporate Refinery

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Courtney Hopper, Hustle + Gather

Craig Howard, The Ballroom at Bayou Place

Cristian Hernandez, Rosendale Events

Dana Buchanan, Primal Alchemy

Dana Kadwell, Hustle + Gather



Crowd favorite **David Merrell** was a hit during his annual trend session *David Merrell Presents: Current Trends in the Events Industry*



During the panel *The Stars Aligned! Creating Cohesiveness Between Culinary & Event Design*, **David Merrell**, **Kristin Banta**, **Rob Pausmith**, **Darrin Roberts**, **Michael Stavros**, and **Clint Upchurch** discussed successful collaboration between culinary programs and event design.



Heather Rogers (left) and **Velia Amarasingham** (right) brought an attendee on stage during their session *Top Ten Tips For Proposals That Pop!*

Speaker Salute!

Danny Bergold, About Entertainment

Darin Bahl, Tailored Twig

Darrin Roberts, Club 33 Membership Experience & Administration, Disney

Dave Mccandless, Sodexo at Hobart & William Smith Colleges

David Hanscom, Y? Entertainment

David Kelty, Polar Leasing

David Kenyon, LEO Events

David Kinney, Catering Creations

David Merrell, AOO Events

David Porto, Blue Plate Catering

Dean Mistretta, Johnson & Wales University

Deborah Elias, Elias Events

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Delores Crum, Premiere Events; Home-Tech Industries, Inc.

Elizabeth Nutting, TK Events Inc

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Geoffrey Barker, Simply Fresh Events

Grace Odogbili, Dining with Grace Inc

Gwendolyn McNutt, CSEP, International Live Events Association

Heather Mason, Caspian Agency

Heather Pilcher, CSEP, CMP, MS, Blue Spark Event Design

Heather Rogers, Curated Entertainment

Heidi Brice, Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering

Holly Sheppard, Fig & Pig Catering

Hugh Groman, The Hugh Groman Group

Ian Ramirez, Madera Estates

Ijaz Jamal, George Brown College

J. Vladimir, J.Vladimir Commercial.Advertising. Fashion Photography

Jackie Cerna, Zeta Event Productions

Jaclyn Watson, Jaclyn Watson Events

Jaka Jaiteh, AOO Events

Jamie Adams, Paisley & Jade

Jamie Lee Quickert, Cvent

Jason King, Pej Events

David Hanscom, Fausto Pifferrer, Brian Green, Christopher Taylor, Tamara Gibson, and Terrica in their panel *You Did What!?: The Real Reason Your Referrals Have Dried Up*



Jason Sutton, Footers Catering

Jay Klein, M-Plus Global Events

Jay Varga, The JDK Group

JC York, Classic Entertainment / Wise Guys Interactive

Jean Claude Etienne, Rosendale Events

Jeffrey Schlissel, ACF, The Bacon Cartel

Jeffrey Selden, Marcia Selden Catering & Events

Jen Salerno, CMP, DES, JTS Connect, LLC | The Room Block Podcast

Jeniffer Bello, CMB, JB Experiences

Jennifer Best, All American Entertainment

Jennifer Perna, Fulton Market Consulting

Jennifer Trotter, Lip Service Makeup

Jim Rand, Caterstrat

Joann Roth-Oseary, Someone's in the Kitchen

Joanne Purnell, Good Gracious! Events

Joelle Paleologou, Peace Arch Hospital Foundation

John McLallen, The Chef's Table

Jonathan Jennings, CT Wedding Group

Jordan Heller, Suncoast Wedding & Event Leaders (SWEL)

Joshua House, The JDK Group

Julia Kendrick Conway, Assaggiare Mendocino, Inc.

Julie Ellis, The Chef's Table

Justin Ball, CMP, Bespoke Event Group LLC

Justin Pasha, The Cup Bearer

Karen O'Connor, Daniel et Daniel

Kate Berris, Forte Belanger

Katerina Chagoya, Orange County Convention Center

Katie Mast, Rock Paper Coin

Katie Sparks, Pier Sixty

Kawania Wooten, Howerton+Wooten Events and the Enlightened Creative

Keith Krzeminski, Shelter Structures America

Keith Sarasin, ACF, The Farmers Dinner; Aatma

Kelly Hunt, LEO Events

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Keyon Hammond, Get Plated

Kristin Banta, Kristin Banta Events Inc

Kristina Johnson, LEO Events

La'Zendra Danforth, CGMP, University of Central Florida College of Pharmacy

Laura Cardo, Kristin Banta Events Inc

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Marcie Booth, Avasant

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Maria Phillips, The Chef's Table

Mark Catuogno, MC Event Consulting LLC

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Marti Winer, MGM Resorts International

Matt Logan, Mangia Catering

Matthew Regan, Boston University Questrom School of Business

Max Chapman, Nowsta

Meg Umlas, Boston University

Meghan Ely, OFD Consulting

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Meredith Commender, CSEP, Significant Events of Texas

Meredith Ryncarz, The Restart Specialist

Meryl Snow, Snowstorm Solutions

Michael Cerbelli, Cerbelli Creative

Michael Israel, Michael Israel Inc

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Michelle Bueno, The Cup Bearer

Michelle Howard, Flora Couture

Mike Bicocchi, Elegant Affairs Caterers

Miro Diamanté, Accent Indy, A DMC Network Company

Mollianne Hubbs, All Occasion Catering

Speaker Salute!

Molly Crouch, Sodexo Live!

Morgan Connacher, CSEP, Haute

Mylo Lopez, MyloFleur

Natalie Lowe, Celebrate Niagara; The Sustainable Events Forum (TSEF)

Nettie Frank, Silver Whisk

Norma Jean Charette, Sodexo University Division

Oniki Hardtman, Oh Niki Occasions

Paige Mejia, Pyrotex

Pam Smith, RDN, PamSmith.com

Paul Buchanan, Primal Alchemy

Paul Seaman, PJB LLC

Paulina Corvi, Events by Paulina

Peter Lentz, Elegant Affairs Caterers

Peter McCaffrey, Leading Caterers of America

Phuoc Vo, CBK Catering & Events

Rajan Mistry, District Events & Catering

Rayven Crisafulli, CMP, CMP-HC, White Magnolia Weddings; University of Florida

Rebecca Salem, Allseated

Renee Adams, R.Collective

Renee Dalo, Moxie Bright Events

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Ryan Hanson, CSEP, CED, DES, BeEvents

Ryan Manning, ACF, Chef Consultant

Sarah Gabel, Green Girl Events

Sarah Hall, Joel's Catering

Sarah Roshan, Sarah Roshan Collective

Scott Frankel, Animatic Media

Sébastien David, Sénik The Event Agency

Selina Mullenax, CMP, CPCE, CORT Events

Shannon Tarrant, Wedding Venue Map

Shaun Gray, Shaun Gray Events, LLC

Shaunelle Murphy, SC Visionary Planning and Production

Sierra Reed, SC Visionary Planning and Production

Steve Moore, Fox Theatre

Steve Sanchez, The JDK Group

Steve Whyte, University of the Pacific

Susie Perelman, Mosaic

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Talley Moore, Ciena

Tamara Gibson, Tamara Gibson Photography

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Tracey Fricke, CSEP, MWP, CMP, Occasion Designed

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Victoria Machin, Victoria Machin Photography

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Zohe Felici, Felici Events; Zohe Felici



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

Photo Credit: Catering Creations



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

Photo Credit: Bonura Hospitality Group



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Photo Credit: Catering by Michael's



Nonprofits

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

Photo Credit: G Catering

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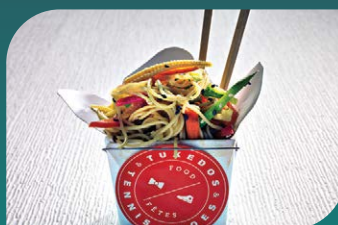
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Is Something Missing in Your Marketing Strategy?



Most of the time, people evaluate vanity metrics. But are they the numbers that really matter? Maybe not.

By Christie Osborne

You're killing it on social media and your website traffic grows consistently. You're posting quality content and it's getting good engagement. You're posting Reels, TikToks, LinkedIn posts, and the like, and you take time to engage with people on those platforms. You're doing all the things.

So why doesn't your traffic convert to sales?

You look at your social media insights and your Google Analytics dashboard, and everything seems good to go—but you still aren't seeing the sales.

The problem? Most of the time, people evaluate vanity metrics. You know, those the Internet says are important, so they make you feel good—metrics like followers and likes. But are they the numbers that really matter? Maybe not.

Use these steps to dig deeper into your analytics and realign your strategy with your goals.

Get back to the basics

Is your traffic qualified? If traffic rates are up but you don't see resulting sales, the problem may be the people visiting your website. Most of your website traffic should look like your ideal client.

Use the Google Analytics Audience report to check three key indicators: location, age, and gender.

For example, if you own an event business in Atlanta, GA, but most of your traffic comes from Chicago, you need to take a deeper look at the source of those leads.

However, if you run an event space for destination weddings in Hawaii,

traffic from Chicago makes more sense! In that case, age and gender demographics are better indicators of whether you see the right traffic.

Once you've found the issue with your traffic, it's time to take action.

If location is the problem, focus on building location-based SEO. Make sure your website and Google My Business account list the city you work in, as well as your radius of service and any feeder cities.

Also, consider writing location-based blog posts to help build your authority with Google. For example, if you're a florist in North Carolina, get specific and write about the best North Carolina flowers for a summer wedding rather than a general summer floral guide. Write to your audience, and you will attract people interested in your location, rather than just the topic.

If you're struggling with the age or gender of your viewers, evaluate your top traffic sources. For example, if you run a wedding rentals company but your traffic is mainly over 40, you need to diversify your marketing efforts.

Make sure you're engaging on the right platforms. If you have an Instagram business page but haven't taken the plunge into TikTok yet, why not now? Likewise, if you only promote your corporate event space on Facebook, consider expanding to LinkedIn. Find out where your ideal clients are spending time, then dedicate your marketing energy to that platform.

Start at the bottom (i.e., where the money lives)

Once you've determined who visits your site, it's time to follow the money. While

If you spend the time to dig past vanity metrics and truly understand your traffic, you will save time and money while taking the necessary steps to grow your business.

vanity numbers look at basic traffic and engagement, you must focus on what brings in the revenue. A business cannot survive on Instagram comments!

Evaluate where people spend the most time on your site. Ideally, you should see high rates on your “About” and “Contact” pages, as well as any landing pages. Engagement on these pages indicates your leads are interested in booking with you. But, if most of your traffic lands on your blog and promptly leaves, your website isn’t doing its job.

With that said, if you have a blog post that’s performing well, use it! Add a call to action at the bottom with a link to your “Services” or “Contact” page. Once you understand what brings people to your site, optimize that content to drive traffic beyond the blog post to inquire about working with you.

Look for quality over quantity

Where do you get most of your conversions? If you get a ton of hits from Pinterest, but they all visit your blog and leave, it isn’t valuable traffic. On the other hand, perhaps only a quarter of your traffic comes from Instagram, but if they are more inclined to purchase your services, you’ll want to invest in Instagram first.

That’s not to say your Pinterest traffic isn’t valuable...yet. After you’ve leveraged your Instagram traffic, focus on fixing conversion rates in your Pinterest traffic. Learn what’s driving them to your site and work to optimize those pages for that audience.



Avoid seeking marketing opportunities on new platforms until you are confident that your existing efforts are effective.

Google Analytics data can seem overwhelming to many. However, if you spend the time to dig past vanity metrics and truly understand your traffic, you will save time and money while taking the necessary steps to grow your business. ●

Updates to Google Analytics

On July 1, 2023 the standard Universal Google Analytics will stop processing data. Google Analytics 4 (GA4) is the next-gen solution for analytics, and it will collect data from both websites and apps. Make sure to download and back up your Google Analytics data, then [create your GA4 account](#) so you’re ready for the transition.

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



ON TREND



Inside REGEN, an immersive 360° multi-sensory journey combining tech, art, and music at Coachella 2022. Photo courtesy Pico

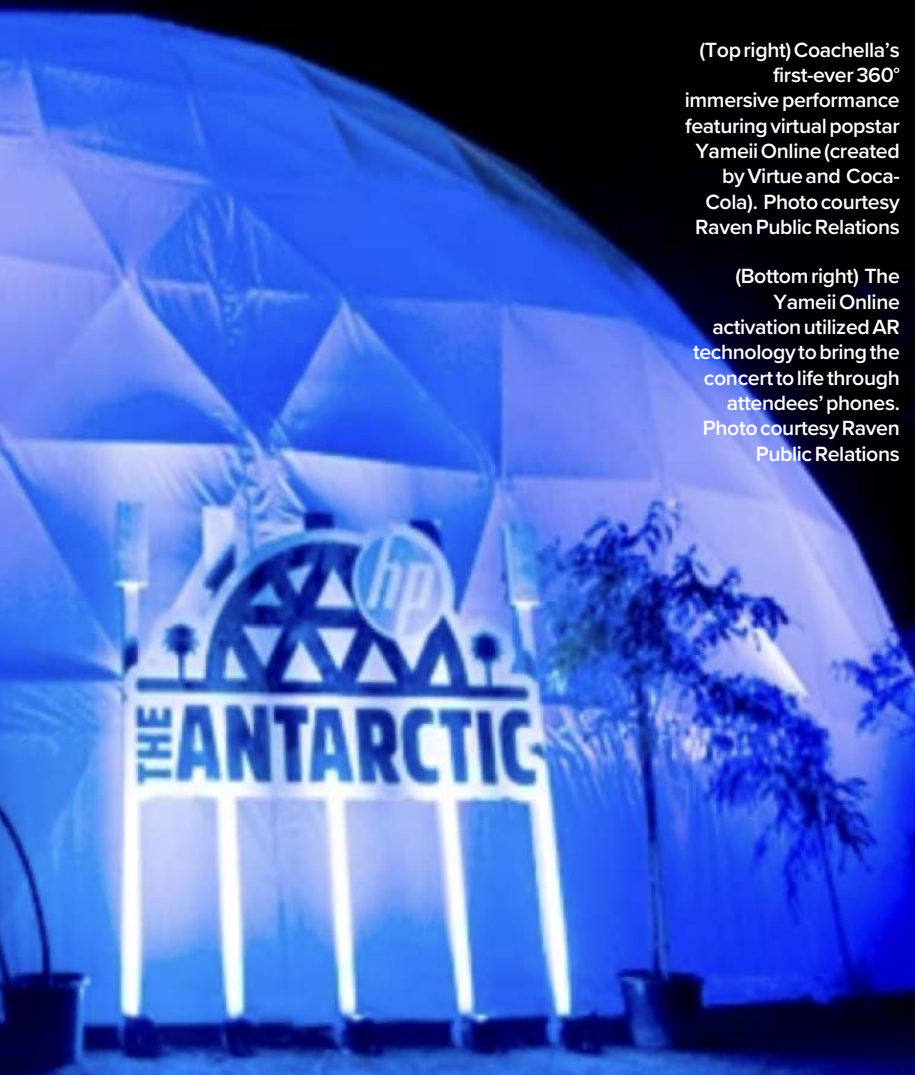


Pico partnered with HP to create the activation REGEN at Coachella 2022. Photo courtesy Pico

Activate Your Event

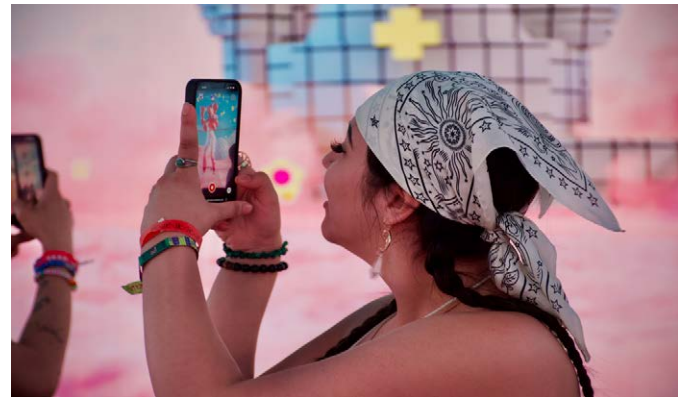
How brand activations are
rocking the events world—and
how to create your own

By Amanda Nicklaus



(Top right) Coachella's first-ever 360° immersive performance featuring virtual popstar Yameii Online (created by Virtue and Coca-Cola). Photo courtesy Raven Public Relations

(Bottom right) The Yameii Online activation utilized AR technology to bring the concert to life through attendees' phones. Photo courtesy Raven Public Relations



It seems that as immersive experiences are on the rise, being steeped in only one world is no longer enough. Immersive brand activations have been growing in popularity the past few years, and they're currently a staple feature of any big event. From Coachella to SXSW to the Super Bowl, brands are working to create entire mini-worlds for guests to disappear inside.

Software company [ZoomInfo](#) describes brand activations as “a campaign, event, or interaction through which your brand generates awareness and builds lasting connections with your target audience. Most brand activations are interactive, allowing audiences to engage directly with a brand and its products.”

These activations are part of a larger marketing strategy to familiarize consumers with a brand; according to HubSpot, it takes five to seven impressions for people to remember a brand. To help, HubSpot says these activations “forge lasting emotional connections between a brand and its target

Done well, brand activations are entire immersive experiences, creating spaces for activities, photo shoots, and fun.

audience. These activations are usually a specific campaign or event that is meant to generate brand awareness and interactivity with your audience.”

According to CEO and Creative Director of AOO Events David Merrell, brand activations are necessary in the modern world. “As print advertising and advertising on live TV continue to be less and less effective, it is important that products remain in front of consumers’ faces,” he told *Special Events*. “This is a great way to get that high-touch encounter with your guests.”

Brand strategies aside—activations are quickly becoming event stars because they’re simply fun to participate in.

ON TREND

The cast of "What We Do in the Shadows" made an appearance at "Nadja's Club" at the FX Activation during 2022 Comic Con International: San Diego. Photo courtesy Matt Winkelmeyer/Getty Image

The "Bob's Burgers" portion of the "Hulu Animayhem: Enter The 2nd Dimension" activation in San Diego, California this summer. Photo courtesy Chelsea Guglielmino/FilmMagic

Activations often hold star power. Here, Mario Lopez attends the 2022 "Pepsi, Where's My Jet?" activation in Los Angeles. Photo courtesy Jerod Harris/Getty Images for Netflix

Coachella: Activation Central

Done well, brand activations are entire immersive experiences, creating spaces for activities, photo shoots, and fun. People enjoy attending these experiences, which can themselves be the draw to an event.

Take Coachella. It's known for its extravagant brand activations. This year, it had experiences from Adidas and musical artist Bad Bunny in the form of a Zen garden; Marvel Studios promoted the new *Guardians of the Galaxy* movie

with a space-themed "abandoned" diner; and American Express partnered with eco-friendly camera company Paper Shoot for a Y2K themed photo shoot.

This year's festival also had its first-ever 360° immersive performance featuring virtual popstar Yameii Online. The soundproof, digital-forward experience from VIRTUE, the agency powered by VICE, was launched in partnership with client Coca-Cola, allowing festival goers to step inside Coca-Cola's world of "Real Magic." The activation utilized AR technology to bring the concert to life through attendees' phones.

Past Coachella activations have been just as intricate. In 2022, Absolut

vodka created Absolut.Land, which incorporated the metaverse into a real-life bar and hangout setup. Spotify had a desert oasis activation, Don Julio Tequila hosted a cocktail experience from an Airstream speakeasy, and HBO Max created a "flight attendant pre-flight lounge" to promote its show *The Flight Attendant*. HP and Pico created REGEN, an **immersive 360° multi-sensory journey** combining tech, art, and music.

Keys to success

Today's consumer thrives on stimulation, so big events are places where attendees look to do more than



MKG partnered with Love Beauty And Planet to create an activation of deluxe “misting tents” at this year’s Coachella. Flowers and turf helped to create a natural feel in line with the brand’s vegan products. Photo courtesy Jordan Capili

observe the main attraction. Lydia Berg-Hammond, Senior Creative Strategist of MKG, an A-list experiential agency, told *Special Events*, “Brand activations bring so much to sports events and festivals, where the point is ostensibly to watch a performance, but a lot of the fun takes place in the lead-up or in-between time. People are looking for something to do between innings or before the headliner goes on, and they’re primed to engage and have fun.

“Of course, guests’ attention is pulled in a million different directions at big events, so the most successful activations offer something they really want and need. For some events, that’s a FOMO-inducing photo op, for others

it’s a well-placed snack or service, an engaging game, or even just a comfy spot to grab some shade.”

Cindy Y. Lo, CEO of experiential marketing and event agency RED VELVET, agrees that brand activations work because of humans’ brief attention spans. “The main reason why brand activations have been so key to sales and marketing initiatives over the years is that we as humans are being sold to every day and every which way. Our attention spans have gotten shorter (no thanks to social media), therefore people are looking to be entertained, wowed, and impressed.”

In other words: pique your target audience’s curiosity. Merrell says

that successful activations include “something that draws them in...the look, the entertainment, something that makes them curious to explore more.”

Getting started

By now you might be brainstorming how to bring activations to your next event—or how to create activations yourself. Here’s what you need to know:

Decide which brands you want to work with.

When you work with a brand, you align yourself with their values. Your future clients are going to look at who



ON TREND



"Pose with the Paw" activation at AT&T TV Super Saturday Night in February 2020. Photo courtesy Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for AT&T



(Above) The Vita Coco activation during the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit celebration of the launch of the 2021 Issue featured an earthy lounge. Photo courtesy Rodrigo Varela/Getty Images for Sports Illustrated Swimsuit

you've aligned yourself with in the past, so look for brands that share common values, interests, and goals.

"Some quick research can usually turn up what creative agencies [brands] work with, so from there you can reach out to their Director of Production to see about opportunities on future projects through pre-production planning or on-site support," says Berg-Hammond. "This will help you to start climbing the production ladder, and from there it's about a willingness to work hard, problem solve, and adapt for the success of the agency and the brand."

This is the time to show off your expertise. "Clients who are wanting to create activations are typically looking for someone who has done it before," says Merrell. "They are concerned about the quality of the event being created, but also the manner attendees/clients are received, how they are treated,

and what messaging the client wants attendees to walk away from [the] event with and how long they retain it."

Get to know the brand.

The true point of an activation is to familiarize attendees with the brand, and to do this, you must start by familiarizing yourself with the brand.

Lo encourages going beyond color and brand guidelines and really understanding the nuances of the brand. "Who is the target audience; what's the voice/tone/style/etc." This includes the language they use, their personality, their overarching narrative, the stories they tell, and the emotions they want to evoke in their target audience.

Define your objective.

While it might seem obvious, Berg-

Hammond says the most important aspect of an activation is the reason behind it. "If someone asks 'why?' and you don't have a good answer, it's unlikely that you're going to have a successful event."

Lo agrees that the activation's objective is the best place to start. "First is to get the client to answer a brief—to truly understand what their hopes/dreams/wishes/desired outcome is with the activation."

Merrell encourages asking a lot of questions to attain "a complete understanding of the product or messaging that they want to get out, and the goals they are hoping to achieve."

Getting clear on the objective also lets you know how to move forward. "Once we're clear on our shared goal," says Berg-Hammond, "we bring in MKG's expertise in creative direction, design, and production, almost always

ON TREND

Chateau Jé Jé

BY JIMMY JOHN'S

*me love you
we sandwiches*

The Grand Entrance of Chateau JéJé, a pop-up activation for Jimmy Johns created by RED VELVET. Photo courtesy Holly Cowart



Al Fresco dining was a feature of Chateau JéJé, a pop-up activation for Jimmy Johns created by RED VELVET. Photo courtesy Holly Cowart

in close collaboration with the client, to execute a brand action that not only hits the objectives, but also pushes the envelope and creates meaningful new connections and assets for the brand.”

Knowing the ins and outs of the brand is the best way to get creative and go beyond the basics. “Our process always starts with talking to the client and really getting to know the brand, their objectives, and what we can do to create the most successful activation for them,” says Berg-Hammond. “Sometimes that means big, blue-sky thinking for a headline-grabbing stunt, and sometimes it’s more about getting a product into consumers’ hands or connecting with a specific audience in a specific way.”

Lo says that successful objectives accomplish three things: people remember the brand, they talk about the

activation effortlessly, and it “does its job of either getting more social media users, getting talked about in the press, etc.—this goes back to each brand’s individual goals/desires.”

Understand the target audience.

Like any event, part of an activations’ success is knowing who is going to be drawn in and participating.

Merrell says to know “who they are, how they want to be approached, and what information does [the brand] wish the audience will take with them.”

The approach you take can vary greatly by demographic. “If the audience is geared toward younger demographics (i.e., teens), because they have not been exposed to as much of the world, it’s

easier to impress them with creative florals or a step and repeat wall,” says Lo. “For someone that is more sophisticated and has seen a lot, it might take a few more dollars to impress them just because they have experienced a lot to get where they are in life.”

Thoroughly understanding the brand’s target audience will uplift the success of the activation and the engagement that it creates. Successful brands conduct market research to know who their target audience is, and utilizing this research will help you create the right type of activation for their demographic.

Develop a real relationship with the brand.

Building a relationship with a brand benefits you both and leads to a more



A chandelier made of microphone décor at Still Austin Music Lounge at Longhorn City Limits. Activation by RED VELVET. Photo courtesy Booth Easy/Geoff Duncan



(Above) Activations provide easy brand marketing opportunities, like this swag given out by Still Austin Whiskey Co at Still Austin Music Lounge at Longhorn City Limits. Activation by RED VELVET. Photo courtesy Booth Easy/Geoff Duncan

successful activation.

“Our success depends on healthy, synergistic relationships with our clients,” says Berg-Hammond. “We want to help them reach their goals and actualize their vision, while offering our expertise...and sometimes a friendly nudge to push the envelope a little.” It’s a tale as old as time: building relationships with healthy communication can eliminate issues and lead to better problem-solving.

Building real relationships also benefits everyone involved. “I think the most successful activations are win-win-win,” says Berg-Hammond, “creating real value for the brand (through new fans, media attention, sampling/sales), for consumers (an awesome experience, a new favorite product, a valuable keepsake),

and for our agency (a strong client relationship, work we can be proud of).”

Be creative.

Event planners know that when it comes to being innovative and creative, no idea is too absurd.

“We do a white board exercise of throwing out all of the craziest ideas that money can’t buy on a wall and see which ideas trickle to the top,” says Lo. “Then we layer it with logistics in making sure that it can realistically happen from both a timing and budget perspective. Of course [we] get the client buy-in and then we adjust based on feedback and keep working toward the deadline.”

After you’ve set your sights high,



The 2023 "Hulu Animaghem: Enter The 2nd Dimension" activation featured a *Futurama* portion with a scene setup. Photo courtesy Chelsea Guglielmino/FilmMagic



see how your ideas can line up with the physical space. Merrell notes that the physical parameters (“when, where, why, and how much”) all help create the design.

The activations that make headlines are those that are unique, bringing fantastical ideas to life, so don’t be afraid to start with big ideas and narrow them only as physical limitations crop up.

Make it photo-worthy.

Strong visual components are key to successful activations. “Many times they are Instagrammable moments, and festivals and Super Bowls, etc., are a great way to pique interest,” says Merrell. “Plus, [attendees] will then push it out through their own social media followers, to extend messaging to

a larger group!”

This is where you can shine as an artist: use bold color palettes and lots of textures, include props, and think of what your design will look like as a photo, Reel, or TikTok video.

Keep it simple.

That being said, innovation shouldn’t mean overly complex. Berg-Hammond recommends keeping a low barrier of entry—and to keep it simple where you can. “People are willing to put in a little work to experience something awesome, but once it gets overly complicated or requires too many steps, you’ll lose your audience’s attention.”

Simplicity combined with easy entry will mean more people truly engaging with the activation.

Don’t forget your KPIs.

“Always start with clarity on objectives and KPIs [key performance indicators]!” Berg-Hammond advises. “It’s easy to look at KPIs at the beginning of a project and then leave them on the backburner while you get excited about details, but it’s wise to revisit them throughout the process, holding them as your true north as you develop the activation and nail down logistics.”

Looking forward

If brand activations were a passing fad, it would be easy to overlook their importance, but that’s not the case. As they continue to trend upward, it seems that activations are here to stay.

“I think [activations] will slowly make [their] way through the different



industries because pre-pandemic, I was seeing this heavily in tech,” says Lo. “Then during the pandemic, a few financial institutions were asking us to get creative for them since they really wanted to show that they were not just an old bank; and now I feel like we are having our CPG (consumer product goods) moment.”

We’re also seeing mobile activations on the rise: portable activations that take place in a vehicle, like an Airstream or VW van. In his Catersource + The Special Event session *DAVID MERRELL PRESENTS: Current Trends in the Events Industry*, Merrell discussed how brands are increasingly using mobile activations for promotion. It’s a “much more inexpensive way to get your marketing out there with your budget.”

As activations make their way into the fabric of events, industry sustainability initiatives still apply.

“Sustainability and DEI awareness continues to be a hot topic,” says Lo, “so often times we have to review our plans to see if we are being conscious of what is being reused post-activation, and did we design the activation to be inclusive (not just for gender, but body types, food preferences, neuro preferences, etc.)?”

While you’re planning your upcoming events, remember that activations are a great way to drive engagement and create a buzz! ●

(Top middle) Attendees pose for a pic at Still Austin Music Lounge at Longhorn City Limits. Activation by RED VELVET. Photo courtesy Booth Easy/ Geoff Duncan

(Bottom middle) A pink vintage car provides a great photo shoot. Activation by MKG. Photo courtesy Jordan Capili

(Directly above) A pop-up activation for Jimmy Johns provided branded social media photo moments. Activation by RED VELVET. Photo courtesy Holly Cowart

How Tech Sets Your Business Up for Lasting Success



If you want to build a business that is here for the long haul, cultivate an internal culture that appreciates tech and uses it to its full potential.

By Nora Sheils

The early stages of entrepreneurship are filled with dreams of the future and the decades of success still to come. But businesses that last 10, 20, and even 50 years don't stick around due to sheer luck. Instead, these long-lasting companies share a dedication to learning and an openness to change.

While industry veterans are bright and innovative, they are also the first to seek help through mentorship, delegation, and—yes—technology. Business tech has grown rapidly and will continue to evolve, providing entrepreneurs with robust, streamlined solutions for everything from bookkeeping to inventory management.

If you want to build a business that is here for the long haul, cultivate an internal culture that appreciates tech and uses it to its full potential. Here are four ways technology will transform how you do business.

GET MORE DONE IN LESS TIME

Every minute counts, especially when you run a business. Time spent on menial tasks (even when delegated) is better allocated to profit-driving activities, like networking, marketing, and sales. By using technology to your advantage, you can save time and guarantee your team members are contributing to the highest good.

Beyond efficiency, automating procedures like onboarding, invoicing, and payment processing

also ensures a consistent brand experience. While you and your team focus on creative work, an optimized tech stack can support the customer journey and ensure clients have everything they need without waiting on your team's availability.

Plus, people are quicker to respond to emails, sign contracts, and pay invoices when they can do so online. So instead of chasing down customers, make the most of your systems and let technology handle it for you. Finally, with the right software and automation, you can ensure a significant reduction in errors within your work.

SAVE MONEY AND RESOURCES

Time is money. With streamlined tech in place, you'll save a significant amount of both by dedicating your working hours to higher-level, sales-driven tasks. But that's not all! Technology can also help you save on overhead expenses, like office supplies, contractors, and even office space. Many digital business tools are cost-effective, with free or low-cost plans available to suit your needs.

Think about it: If you had the choice to spend \$1,000 on software or \$5,000 on a virtual assistant to perform the same duties for a year, what would you pick? Of course, software is the sensible decision—and that doesn't even factor in your time spent on training and oversight. So,

Time is money. With streamlined tech in place, you'll save a significant amount of both by dedicating your working hours to higher-level, sales-driven tasks.

when comparing business solutions, consider the financial and non-financial costs to make the right call.

MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

A successful business is the result of many wise decisions. From identifying your ideal client to refining your brand message, entrepreneurs face make-or-break choices every day—and those that find lasting success know that a gut feeling isn't based on facts. Instead, sustainable business owners rely on cold, hard data to support their decision-making processes. They review website analytics, check social media insights, parse through customer feedback, and run profit-and-loss reports.

If you want to build a business that's here to stay, you need to know your numbers. Fortunately, modern technology makes it easier than ever to track data that clues you into your business's performance. Is your sales approach working? Check your CRM! Are your blog posts attracting new leads? Check your website analytics! You can answer any business question with the help of technology, so there's no reason to guess.

ADAPT TO CHANGE SWIFTLY

When the world shut down in early 2020, it became clear that some businesses were agile and could quickly transition to remote work.



Others were not so fortunate. Instead, they struggled to implement new software and manage teams from a distance when the focus should have been on communicating with clients.

While we can't predict the future, staying current with technology enables businesses to be more flexible and adapt to market shifts without much trouble. For example, automation eliminates "busy work" so you can respond to changes promptly without letting smaller tasks fall through the cracks. Embracing software that supports remote work allows you and your team to collaborate, even when you cannot meet in person. When you integrate tech into all aspects of your business, it makes it much easier to roll with the punches and come out on top.

Implementing technology throughout your company will

involve a learning curve as you and your team transition to a more integrated digital environment. However, as you update your processes and reap the benefits of tech, it'll become second nature to trust your systems to keep the gears turning while you focus on sustainability and growth! ●

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, including *Wedding MBA*, *Catersource*, *NACE Experience*, and *Coterie Retreat*.

20th Annual Event Company SPOTLIGHT

We asked our readers how their past year transpired, what events they nailed, and what trends they spy on the horizon. Here's what they said.

Analog EVENTS & MARKETING

Analog Events

BEVERLY HILLS, CA
www.analogevents.com

Chief Executive: Jordan Kaye

2022 Event Count: 36

Noteworthy Events:

- House of Peacock: a monthlong storefront activation at The Grove for EMMY FYC season
- Privé Revaux birthday celebration for Jamie Foxx in Paris
- MTV Unplugged with JID in Atlanta
- Numerous Peacock red carpet premieres from *Queer as Folk* to Angelyne to Girls5eva
- iHeartRadio events like Wango Tango

Trend Forecast:

- Sustainability: As people become more environmentally conscious, sustainability is a top priority, from reducing on-site waste to using eco-friendly materials.
- Personalization: Attendees want events that are tailored to their specific interests and needs. Analog sees a future using data and technology to create even more personalized experiences.
- Safety and security: In the wake of recent events, safety and security are even more of a priority these days. From screening attendees to implementing emergency plans, Analog takes steps to ensure the safety of attendees, vendors, and clients.



Ashfield
Event Experiences
Part of Inizio Engage

Ashfield Event Experiences

PHILADELPHIA, PA
www.ashfieldeventex.com

Chief Executive: Russ Lidstone

2022 Event Count: 750

Noteworthy Events:

- An employee engagement “Stronger Together” event, delivered for their client Genmab, an international biotechnology company. This event secured 2 Silver and 1 Bronze American Business Awards as well as becoming a finalist at the prestigious PM Society Awards.

Trend Forecast:

- Live events are back with a vengeance. People want to be back together. Until March 2022, Ashfield’s clients were very cautious and postponed events to be face-to-face. The pent-up demand led to June and September being busier than pre-pandemic, and they are seeing much shorter lead times from clients because of this.
- There is a realization that good hybrid meetings take a lot more effort (and budget). There are still plenary sessions/presentations being broadcast, but hybrid meetings are not as much in demand as originally expected. Ashfield is seeing some clients running smaller and shorter meetings virtually, while

focusing on the face-to-face element and networking opportunities for the larger meetings.

Behind the Scenes

MEMPHIS, TN

www.btsmemphis.com

Chief Executive: Dusky Norsworthy

2022 Event Count: 120

Noteworthy Events:

- Washington, DC: A 2-day event where business leaders met with local Congressman and Senators to focus on state and city results.
- Miami, Florida: The International Cotton Convention, streamed globally in multiple languages.

Trend Forecast:

- Increased focus on building a strong corporate culture as the future of work continues to change.
- New ways to network (creating spaces that foster networking and creativity, while allowing participants to choose their comfort level).

- More “choose your own adventure” events, allowing attendees more choices beyond sessions to take part in.
- Enhanced focus on sustainability, more green resources.

BDS Catering & Productions

WEST PALM BEACH, FL

www.bdscaters.com

Chief Executive: Boris Seymore

2022 Event Count: 150

Noteworthy Events:

- BDS hosted multiple events and was offered to assist with Chef Showcases and different mentoring opportunities for the community.

Trend Forecast:

- Increased focus on food menu, serving, etc. Food is an essential part of any event as that is what people remember the most. It is also an important part of culture, heritage, and identity that connects and brings people together.

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Champagne Events

MONTREAL, QC, CANADA

www.champagneevenements.com

Chief Executive: Sebastien David

2022 Event Count: 25

Noteworthy Events:

- 2022 YWCA Charity Gala
- Multiple conferences for Pharma clients across North America
- Multiple galas and fundraisers

Trend Forecast:

- Chic and elegant feel
- Popping colors
- Textures over textures
- Gold and silver
- Technology is a requirement and must be user-friendly



Corporate Magic

DALLAS, TX

www.corporatemagic.com

Chief Executive: Jim Kirk

2022 Event Count: 48

Noteworthy Events:

- 2022 Mazda North America Dealer Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee: a multi-faceted event that engaged dealers in two waves. The event included multiple general sessions, dinners, and high-tech labs, giving dealers an up-close look at Mazda's new products, marketing campaigns, and innovative dealership technology. The Nashville State Grounds served as the primary venue and an exclusive private party was hosted at Marathon Music Works.
- 2022 Dallas Cowboys Season Kickoff event: a live broadcast of the Blue Carpet event allowed fans worldwide to join in, watching players and their significant others arriving and posing for photos. The players' presentation at the Ford Center showcased the team's unity and spirit while allowing players to interact with fans and share their enthusiasm for the upcoming season.

Trend Forecast:

- Immersive worlds that captivate attendees and stimulate active participation. The latest trend in this space is centered around crafting captivating virtual and augmented reality experiences that

integrate art, technology, and storytelling to foster meaningful connections and inspire creativity. With increasing demand, immersive experiences are becoming a staple of corporate events, trade shows, and product launches.



CSI DMC

WASHINGTON, D.C.

www.csi-dmc.com

Chief Executives: David Hainline, Tom Hubler, Amberlee Huggins, Hope Valentine

2022 Event Count: 1074

Noteworthy Events:

- Las Vegas: Rife with supply chain shortages, CSI DMC helped their corporate franchise client navigate and source materials when exhibitors grew 11 times over in record time.
- Nashville: An unforgettable street party for 8,000 people during a highly anticipated multi-day program. CSI DMC collaborated with the city, 68 vendors, 42 shops, various entertainment, and supporting acts, and coordinated 15,000 meals. The creative team developed 529 concepts to meet the explosion of boutique and mid-sized programs focused on customized attendee experiences.
- Orlando: After four date changes, 1,300 eager attendees celebrated a company rebrand. The CSI DMC team crafted fun-filled, brand-centric special events over four nights, including gifting of an autographed guitar from a rock band.

Trend Forecast:

- Climate change concerns are front-page news, and sustainable sourcing and eco-friendly events are far beyond a trend. Practical, feel-good solutions that don't break the budget are critical. CSI DMC finds that taking a collaborative, step-by-step approach with their internal practices, vendors, venues, and clients leads to deeper buy-in and quantifiable success.
- The continued surge in events that promote healthy living, community giving, and kindness. Schedules that intentionally program time for mental health breaks and destination immersion support evidence of increased attendee engagement and connection, a win-win for all!
- Forecasting the speed of advancements in virtual (VR) and augmented reality (AR) is tricky. However,

there is value in leveraging these technologies to connect attendees to events anywhere, from virtual trade show booths to AR product demos and beyond. It is a very compelling time to be in the events industry!

dfx Entertainment

HIGGANUM, CT
www.dfxent.com

Chief Executive: Nicole Cassarino-Conlon

2022 Event Count: 350

Noteworthy Events:

- Grand opening MGM Music Hall at Fenway Park
- Grand opening Resorts World Hudson Valley Casino 2022
- New Years Eve Mohegan Sun 2022 Themed Moulin Rouge Party
- Easter Seals Crystal Ball Farmington Polo Club
- Lego Systems Play Day Yard Goats Stadium

Trend Forecast:

- More experiential and immersive events
- More themed events, with venue selection based on the theme of the event
- Total transformation of spaces
- Interactive areas
- More digital enhancements

EMM Creative Arts Co.

VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA
www.emmcreativearts.com

Chief Executive: Erica Marrello

2022 Event Count: 25

Noteworthy Events:

- Burnaby Blues Festival
- Skratz Bastid's BBQ
- Harvest Haus Oktoberfest Festival
- Abbotsford International Airshow
- Ambleside Music Festival

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- UBC AMS Block Party
- Vancouver International Polo Festival
- A Tale of the Forest: Glenmorangie exclusive tasting event

Trend Forecast:

- After almost three years of pandemic-related separations, bringing people together is more important than ever. 2023 is the year of prioritizing social gatherings, get-togethers, special events, team bonding, and bringing people together after the wild times of the holidays and finally feeling normal(ish) post-pandemic.
- Prioritizing self-care
- Maximalism: patterns on patterns, brights on bolds, color on color

Event Solutions

SANTA MONICA, CA

www.eventsolutions.com

Chief Executive: Brad Lipshy

2022 Event Count: 100

Noteworthy Events:

- “The Future of Water” Conference in San Francisco
- XOS Trucks’ Fleet Week Product Launch
- NBA2K Video Game Wrap Party

Trend Forecast:

- Company retreats, employee excursions, and brand activation events were among the biggest shifts in the corporate events industry. Event Solutions predicts that they will continue to grow into 2023 and beyond.
- A shift for events that consider company culture and values are being brought to the table in the planning phase. CSRs (Corporate Social Responsibility) such as diversity, equality, inclusion, and environmental awareness are playing bigger parts in the selection of everything from venue to vendors.

Hana April Inc.

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

www.hanaaprilinc.com

Chief Executive: Hana April Chughtai

2022 Event Count: 50+

Noteworthy Events:

- Surescripts Picnic: Brought together families, spouses, and households for an inaugural companywide event.
- A bold color palette wedding design in Chicago, with 3D huge dinosaurs a garden, and fairytale energy.

Trend Forecast:

- Going full speed ahead on small attention to details
- Guest experience: How guests feel, interact, and entertain themselves is important

Haute

AUSTIN, TX

www.wearehaute.com

Chief Executive: Alisa Walsh, CITP, CIS

2022 Event Count: 106

Noteworthy Events:

- NI Connect: May 2022, 2,000 guests, Austin, TX
- Meta in Reel Life: September 2022, 150 influencers, New York, NY
- Marriott International Topline Leadership Summit: September 2022, 1,500 guests, Orlando, FL
- Children’s Hospitality of Los Angeles Gala (featuring Justin Timberlake): October 2022, 1,300 guests, Los Angeles, CA
- BMW Product Brand Experience: November 2022, 600 guests, Palm Springs, CA
- Fluence MJBizCon Tradeshow & Hospitality: November 2022, 30,000, Las Vegas, NV

Trend Forecast:

- Haute believes that business is personal and that connecting to the audience is the only goal that truly matters. This means looking at the people first, with priorities of inclusion, diversity, and neurodiversity and how our industry can lead a change for good.
- Measuring events not only with ROI but also with ROE (Return on Emotion). Authentic human-to-human connection will drive business in the coming years; it isn’t about impressions on tens of thousands of people but the personal connection and championship of brands that can create these through more intimate and real moments.
- Sustainability and true (and cost-effective) methods of reducing our footprint with the experience we create will be required in the coming years. Not simply greenwashing but an infrastructure that allows us to continue exceeding business goals while being mindful of how continuing to meet in person impacts the world. The next few years in the live events industry will let us innovate rapidly.

J. Scott Weddings

DALLAS, TX

www.jscottweddings.com

Chief Executive: Jessica Scott

2022 Event Count: 22

Noteworthy Events:

- A gorgeous wedding at The Thompson (Chicago, IL) for a professional golfer and all of his New York family that flew in by the masses. It was quite the black-tie affair.

Trend Forecast:

- Very long, giant dinner tables that feel like one big table

- Guest lists of friends and family, and not everybody that they've ever known getting invited

Laurel & Co. Events

DALLAS-FORT WORTH, TX

www.laureleventstx.com

Chief Executive: Abigail Gibson

2022 Event Count: 42

Noteworthy Events:

- A 6-figure winter wonderland wedding
- A New Year's Eve wedding with a 1,000 balloon drop
- Color filled weddings
- Over-the-top birthday parties

Trend Forecast:

- Larger events focused on statement decor and detailed place settings
- Unique entertainment



LEO Events

MEMPHIS, TN

www.leoevents.com

Chief Executive: Cindy Brewer

2022 Event Count: 200

Noteworthy Events:

- Walmart's 2022 Shareholders' Meeting, staging presentations and performances for over 14,000 associates, using augmented reality and theater techniques to create a content-rich spectacle of story and emotion.

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- AutoZone's National Sales Meeting, delivering 17 different events, including 16+ hours of General Session programming, 13 Breakout Sessions, and over 50 meal functions for 3,200+ attendees.
- Hilton's Global Owners Conference, delivering 8 hours of C-Suite executive content, a tradeshow-esque "Network Hub," five brand showcase rooms, and more for over 2,500 attending owners, representatives, and guests.
- Some of LEO's best festival work was on display by working with the New Mexico Tourism Department to create five incredible Arts Festivals across the state: the Las Cruces Space Festival, Riverfest, Silver City Blues Festival, Nashville to New Mexico, and the Gallup Inter-tribal Ceremonial.

Trend Forecast:

- At the moment, there's the AI explosion, which LEO views as a tool we can wield to expedite and enhance the experiences we create, made by and for humans.
- The plateau of remote and hybrid work has catalyzed renewed demand for enriched networking and genuine teambuilding.
- Sustainability has graduated from trend to imperative, and LEO predicts brands and event attendees will expect more measurable and meaningful action.
- Disruptive thinking—redefined by a new generation—will once again be in favor. There will be greater interest in an "ideas-first" mindset, sharpened into a marketplace where small companies, industry newcomers, and larger incumbents compete for similar business opportunities.

New Moon Entertainment

LAS VEGAS, NV

www.newmoonentertainment.net

Chief Executive: Matthew Gucu

2022 Event Count: 100+

Noteworthy Events:

- Event for Workday at Mandalay Bay Hotel Beach
- Event for Home Depot at Mandalay Bay Hotel Beach
- Event for Harris Computers at Brooklyn Bowl

Trend Forecast:

- Social Media tool integration for promoting events
- AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality) inclusion
- AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) will help with marketing, artwork, etc.

RED VELVET

AUSTIN, TX

www.weareredvelvet.com

Chief Executive: Cindy Y. Lo

2022 Event Count: 50

Noteworthy Events:

- Wheel Health All Hands Employee Conference (150 pax)
- The Life Coach School Mastermind Conference (1500 pax)
- Austin PBS Media Center Debut (5000+ pax)
- SailPoint Navigate 2022 Conference (800 pax)
- Silicon Labs NA+EU Conference (500 pax)
- Tito's 25th Anniversary Luxury weekend trip for 125 guests and +1s

Trend Forecast:

- The advent of ChatGPT and AI and how to intelligently and safely integrate them, enhancing processes and work products without sacrificing integrity
- Events during a recession and in the aftermath
- Motivating a team during hard times to sell services with authenticity, confidence, and courage
- Returning to hybrid and virtual out of fiscal necessity and learning how to best make use of the lessons from the pandemic

SENIK The Event Agency

MONTREAL, QC, CANADA

www.senik.ca

Chief Executive: Sebastien David

2022 Event Count: 130

Noteworthy Events:

- A 42-cities client roadshow for a financial client over six weeks
- Two different one-week conferences for a retail client in Mexico and the Dominican Republic
- Three three-days conferences across Canada for a retail client
- First Nation conference with a public institution

Trend Forecast:

- Green events
- Reward and recognition event for staff are a must as a hybrid remote work system stays in place

Steve LeVine Entertainment & Public Relations

SCOTTSDALE, AZ

www.slentertainment.com

Chief Executive: Steve LeVine

2022 Event Count: 524

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Noteworthy Events:

- Breaking the attendance record at the Chandler Chamber Ostrich Festival (a [Special Events Gala Award](#) recipient) with over 150,000 attendees. Steve LeVine Entertainment has produced this event for the past seven years, but this year's festival was hosted as a two-weekend event for the first time in history! The star-studded lineup included Walker Hayes, Nelly, Flo Rida, The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Beach Boys, The Band Perry, and Uncle Kracker.
- Scottsdale Fashion Week: brought back after a two-year COVID hiatus; hosted the seventh year of Fashion Week 4 Kids with 2,000 people in attendance.

Trend Forecast:

- Technology is playing an increasingly important role in events. From event apps to virtual and augmented reality, technology is being used to enhance the overall attendee experience. The expansion of AI has opened new possibilities for event planners. With the ability to analyze large amounts of data and learn from attendee behavior, AI and big data can help event planners make more informed decisions about everything from the peak time for festival-goer purchases to feedback on marketing efforts.



The Special Event Company

RALEIGH, NC

www.specialeventco.com

Chief Executive: Sally Webb, CSEP

2022 Event Count: 75

Noteworthy Events:

- nSight User Conference for Banking Software Leader, nCino: 1,500 attendees, three days, Raleigh, NC
- Franchisee Conference for Affordable Care Inc.: 700 attendees, four days, Miami, FL
- Recognition & Awards program for top performers, First Citizens Bank - 350 attendees, three days, Nashville, TN
- Beyond Duke Alumni Global Recognition Virtual Broadcast
- Pepsi Annual Sales Conference: 350 attendees, two days, Raleigh NC

Trend Forecast:

- Putting the FUN back into events is a huge strategy reversal from mid-2022 onward. As people began to return to live events, the trend of being "all business" at conferences has moved to reimagining the attendee experience to make it more valuable and relationship driven. COVID made people's time with their families more important, meaning that their time away from home needs to be more rewarding and not just an "information dump."
- Many events that went virtual during the last few years will never go back to live as it makes little economic sense, and the option to view portions of a conference on demand virtually rather than in person is here to stay.

VIBRANT TABLE

CATERING & EVENTS

Vibrant Table Catering & Events

PORTLAND, OR

www.vibranttable.com

Chief Executive: Art Fortuna

2022 Event Count: 757

Noteworthy Events:

- Partnership with The RK Group for LIV Golf
- NIKE Global Events
- Oregon State University Foundation Event
- Daimler Trucks North America LLC Event

Trend Forecast:

- Menus and floorplans are moving toward a mingling, reception-style experience with shorter programs.
- Clients will continue to be interested in small plates and stations like sliders and fries, individual hors d'oeuvres plates or something fun like a taco bar. This goes along with the more casual, social vibe. Plus, guests appreciate the variety.
- Venues that offer unique experiences like indoor/outdoor flexibility or specialized audio/visual continue to be in high demand.

We Crush Events

LOS ANGELES, CA

www.wecrushevents.com

Chief Executive: Jessica Cheney

2022 Event Count: 183

Noteworthy Events:

- VideoAmp's HMCNMG MMXXII, an annual conference with 500 guests over four days.
- Rosendin Electric: Holiday Nights at Zoo Lights, Phoenix Zoo
- C2 Financial Holiday Party, Punch Bowl Social
- Illumina MTT Summer BBQ Picnic, De Anza Cove
- Partner ESI: San Diego After Party, Rustic Root

Trend Forecast:

- Event hosts are definitely looking for more creative entertainment and wellness options. More and more hosts want "something different" and bigger than they've had in the past.
- Wellness enhancements have been slowly making their way onstage for years, but now it is one of the

most important aspects of conferences. Experiences like sunrise beach yoga, CrossFit competitions, and creative mental breaks have definitely been popular lately.

- Hybrid, more travel/incentive, more overall event spend and budgets. ●



Event goers are **looking for bold, artistic catering** that anchors them in the event experience and provides social media-worthy subject matter.



Food Trend *Roundup*

The latest in event f&b

by Amanda Nicklaus



Innovative food and beverage isn't necessarily required for a successful event, but it should be. Since the re-emergence of events post-pandemic, eventgoers are expecting bold, artistic catering that anchors them in the event experience and provides social media-worthy subject matter.

2023 is flying by, and as we approach the midpoint of the year, we're taking a look at rising food fads, trends, and megatrends. Between those seen at this year's Catersource + The Special Event (CS+TSE), held this past March in Orlando, and those by our catering and event beacons, here are the latest trends you should incorporate into your events.

(From left to right) Using "imperfect" produce and other foods is a trending method for limiting food waste.

Marcia Selden Catering & Events serves their own version of classic comfort food. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events

Elegant Affairs serves Green Goddess shooters in test tubes. Photo courtesy Andrea Correale

Tree by Naked, Yoyogi Park is a virtual reality restaurant in Tokyo, Japan where projected images and lighting guide diners through a storyline during a six-course meal. Photo courtesy Tomohiro Ohsumi/Getty Images

FOOD FOR FÊTES

1. NON-ALCOHOLIC COCKTAILS

Whether it's mixing in mocktails between alcoholic beverages, being sober, avoiding alcohol for pregnancy, or just not drinking for the night, there's a variety of reasons people are choosing non-alcoholic (NA) beverages. But that doesn't mean people don't want the complexity of a craft beverage.

With the "sober curious" movement on the rise, NA drinks are stepping into the spotlight. Alcohol-free distilled spirits, wine, and beer are on the market, and non-alcoholic content is trending. In his session at this year's CS+TSE, *Caterers Assemble! Tantalizing Trends, Captivating Concepts, Inspired Interactivity*, Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) talked about how many non-alcoholic spirits are available and how well they're made. "You're still enjoying that same flavor profile."

NA bars and bottle shops are beginning to pop up on the map as well. Places like Spirited Away (NYC), Awake Denver (Denver), Marigold (Minneapolis), and Sans Austin (the first non-alcoholic bar in the United States, located in next year's CS+TSE destination of Austin, TX!) offer a variety of zero-proof spirits, wines, beers, mixers, and cocktails. With so many products on the market and shops across the U.S., it's clear that non-alcoholic beverages are in demand.

"It's hard to find your space socially when it isn't the normal, it's not the norm to not drink," said Marigold owner Erin Flavin in [an interview with WCCO 4 News](#). "I think sobriety is a total spectrum, and people should feel accepted anywhere they fall in that line."

Throughout the week, CS+TSE attendees were offered choices between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, like the MEZZmerizing Spritzer offered at The MEZZ during the venue tour, which featured muddled cucumber, lemon juice, lime juice, agave, and club soda, and was garnished with a cucumber slice.



(Top) The Closing Night Celebration at CS+TSE '23 offered a Blue Iceberg Mango Mule (ginger beer, honey syrup, mango puree, lime juice, and fresh cucumbers). Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

(Above) Attendees of the Venue Tour tried the MEZZmerizing Spritzer (muddled cucumber, lemon juice, lime juice, agave, club soda, and cucumber slice). Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

2. GLOBAL INFLUENCE

We are a globalized society, and as the internet gives us greater insight into each other's worlds, cuisine from around the globe is escalating in demand. Not only that, people want the food of their own cultural traditions served in an authentic, respectful way.

Food with a Pan-Asian influence is especially popular. From dim sum to bao to curry to canned fish, traditional Asian dishes are populating menus. But even though traditional food is popular, so is Asian fusion and general Asian ingredient influence. Attendees on the event venue tour, for example, were served tuna tacos where a wonton shell took the place of a tortilla. There were also a couple of Asian-inspired burgers created during this year's DICED competition: one entry was an Asian-style burger with Korean barbecue sauce, kimchi slaw, and rice wine pickled cucumbers on the side; another, a bison meatloaf slider was served with a banh mi slaw and Thai chili sauce.

The Closing Night Celebration, which wrapped up this year's conference, was themed "International Block Party," and featured food from all around the world. On the map was South America (empanadas, ceviche shooters, and paella); Africa (chicken kabobs with preserved lemon and olives, Moroccan flatbread); Europe (tapas, bruschetta, and wine served in a Catalonian narrow-spouted Porrón pitcher), Asia (hibachi, Korean BBQ short ribs, and steam buns); and Australia (canapé-style avocado toasts and shrimp on the barbie).

(Middle right) Spanish-influenced paella was a hit at the Closing Night Celebration's International Block Party. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

(Bottom right) The Closing Night Celebration served food from around the world, like this "shrimp on the barbie" from Australia. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



A bison meatloaf slider with a banh mi slaw and Thai chili sauce from this year's DICED competition. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



3. COMFORT FOOD

Trying new food is always delightful, but sometimes we just want comfort food. From childhood classics to lazy day treats, comfort food options are a must—and the way to serve those comforting classics is with innovative design.

Art of Catering Food, a chef-focused conference held immediately before CS+TSE, served attendees plenty of elevated comfort food, like beautifully decorated doughnuts by Chef Nettie

Frank, risotto-style pasta from executive Chef Charlie Schaffer, and mini chicken and waffle cones with mashed potatoes from Chef Chris Towne.

Stavros also discussed reimagining comfort food, like reinventing chicken pot pie as a canape in a puff pastry. He pointed to Marcia Selden Catering & Events for their elevated fast food in nostalgic packaging. “Never ever doubt nostalgia,” he told his audience.

Marcia Selden Catering & Events serves their own version of classic comfort food. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events

(Below) Fried macaroni and cheese balls were a treat on this year’s Venue Tour. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMy Photos.



Chef Nettie Frank’s blueberry cobbler doughnuts were a hit during Art of Catering Food 2023. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



The arancini served at the Closing Night Celebration was held by spoons in a server-held vertical board. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

4. UNIQUE SERVING VESSELS

We all know how the pandemic forced caterers to turn to creative individual servings of food. But while pandemic restrictions for events have faded, the creativity of individual servings has stayed trendy, evolving into quests for unique serving vessels.

At Blue Elephant Events & Catering, thrifted odds and ends, like empty light bulbs, tea candle trays, mini martini glasses, paper cones, and even mini plastic cocktail shakers, are given second life as serving vessels.

During her session *Culinary Inspiration & Trends with Andrea Correale*, Andrea Correale of Elegant Affairs showed examples of their unique serving vessels, like salads and bar snacks served in test tubes, a veggie salad served in a wooden garden box, mini charcuterie bites served on upright-standing forks, and even edible bowls made from bound and molded seeds.

Attendees of CS+TSE got to experience some of these fun vessels in real life:

- Charcuterie in paper cones
- Apps served in martini glasses
- Mini deep-dish handled trays
- Mini serving walls held by waiters with slots for individual spoons holding small bites

Go to the [Catersource blog](#) for more ideas on unique serving vessels.



This entry from this year's DICED competition elevated the presentation of a burger in a mini roasting pan from American Metalcraft. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Martini glasses held apps instead of beverages at the Closing Night Celebration. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



5. INTERACTIVE STATIONS

Instead of letting guests grab food from a static station, themed interactive service is on the rise. These stations often offer communal, customizable menu options, [like a make-your-own chocolate bar station](#), where guests can choose flavors and toppings. Build-your-own stations can apply to a multitude of foods: s'mores, tacos, waffles—it's only a matter of getting creative.

There are also more theatrical approaches, like a CATIE award-winning “gardening” station from Catering by Design where guests “planted” seeds that “grew” the dishes on the menu (for more on this and other action stations from this year’s CATIE awards, turn to page 16 in *Catersource* magazine at the back of this issue).

Even this year’s Closing Night Celebration took a theatrical approach to food stations: as small as scanning a QR code to learn more about the food to an entire acrobatic performer perched (literally—in a giant birdcage) next to some small bites.

At this year’s Closing Night Celebration, attendees could grab appetizers from a birdcage where an acrobat performed. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

For Catering by Design’s gardening station, a “gardener” serves plated dishes from the seeds the guests “planted,” all handed up by servers underneath the station. Photo courtesy Catering by Design



Lisa Dupar Catering offers a “Bean to Bar” customizable chocolate bar station. Photo courtesy Saskia Potter Photography



FOOD FOR FÊTES



(Top left) In his session, Michael Stavros discussed how M Culinary Concepts has partnered with Alvéole, a company that installs beehives on the properties of schools and businesses. Photo courtesy Alvéole

(Bottom left) One of the easiest ways to practice sustainability is by partnering with a food redistribution company, like Waste Not in Arizona (where M Culinary Concepts is located), which collects excess food and redistributes it to organizations that support those in need. Photo courtesy Waste Not

6. SUSTAINABLE EATING

Catering is an easy place to make a difference in environmental sustainability, which is why we hope this trend is here to stay. The 2023 Food & Beverage Trend Report from SupHerb Farms states that “sustainability efforts are now table stakes for all food industry players, particularly as Gen Z and Millennials place greater importance on climate change as a purchase driver. Sustainability will impact every aspect of the food industry, from ingredients and production to packaging and shipping.”

Food waste is a major contributor to event-produced carbon emissions (turn to page 20 for more on that). On top of that, event attendees are increasingly requesting plant-forward options. With [vegetarian](#), [vegan](#), [flexitarian preferences](#), and more, it’s important to be creating clear communication between your client, their guests, and your caterer.

Look for caterers who are taking sustainable actions. This could mean that they source their ingredients sustainably, from local and ethical distributors. Stavros gave his session audience several ideas to create sustainable catering: raise bees, garden their own food, use upcycled or imperfect food, donate leftovers to redistribution organizations. By working with a sustainability-minded caterer, you can be sure you’re providing your clients with responsible options.





(Above) iChina Restaurant in San Jose, CA uses VR technology to take dining to the next level. Photo courtesy iChina

(Above right) Dining at the Frost Museum fundraiser took place in the Frost Science Center's Gulf Stream Aquarium, where guests could watch sea life glide overhead through an Oculus lens. Photo courtesy Lazaro Llanes

(Right) In line with the Frost Museum fundraiser's paleontology theme, Constellation Culinary Group created an interactive dessert of chocolate "fossils" and edible rocks beneath crushed up Oreo cookies, where guests could channel their inner paleontologist and brush off the "dirt" to find the hidden fossil. Photo courtesy Lazaro Llanes



7. EXPERIENTIAL DINING

We all know that "immersive" is the word of the year. But as you plan your events, don't forget to include food and beverage in the experience! The SupHerb Farms report also notes that "high-impact sensory experiences in foods and beverages will offer consumers escape from ongoing chaos, uncertainty, and instability. Operators and manufacturers will experiment with ingredients and preparations that create amped-up textural, visual, olfactory, and auditory experiences."

In agreement, an article from [PureWow](#) notes that "searches for 'underwater restaurants' were up 263 percent and searches for 'dinner theaters' were up 109 percent," the past year. People are looking for an eating experience. This

can include elements like performers, tableside service, multi-sensory dining, dining in the dark, and even AR technology.

A great example of this is last year's fall fundraiser for the [Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science](#). The dinner portion of the event was intricately tied into the overarching event theme, An Evening of Discovery: Digging Deep into Paleontology, with "carnivore" and "herbivore" options and even a "fossil" dessert.

Get more ideas from our blog post "[Incorporate Immersive Dining Trends into Your Next Event.](#)"

As you plan your upcoming events, take a page from the trendsetters' book and try some of these popular elements! ●



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

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

Photo Credit: Catering Creations



Weddings

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

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

Photo Credit: Bonura Hospitality Group



Social

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

Photo Credit: Catering by Michael's



Nonprofits

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

Photo Credit: G Catering

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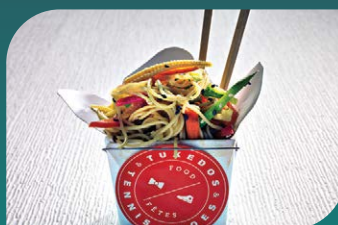
Photo Credit: Zilli Hospitality Group



SOUTH

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

Photo Credit: Bill Hansen Catering



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

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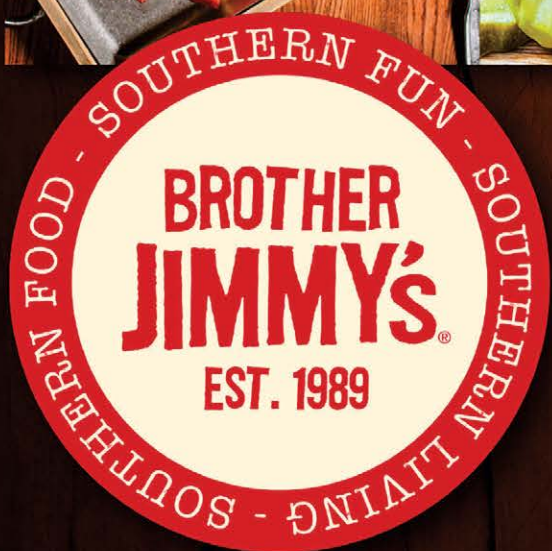
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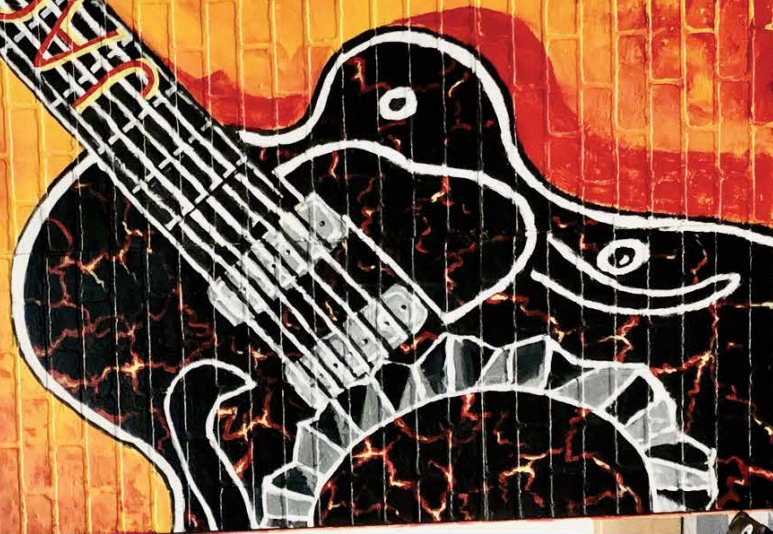
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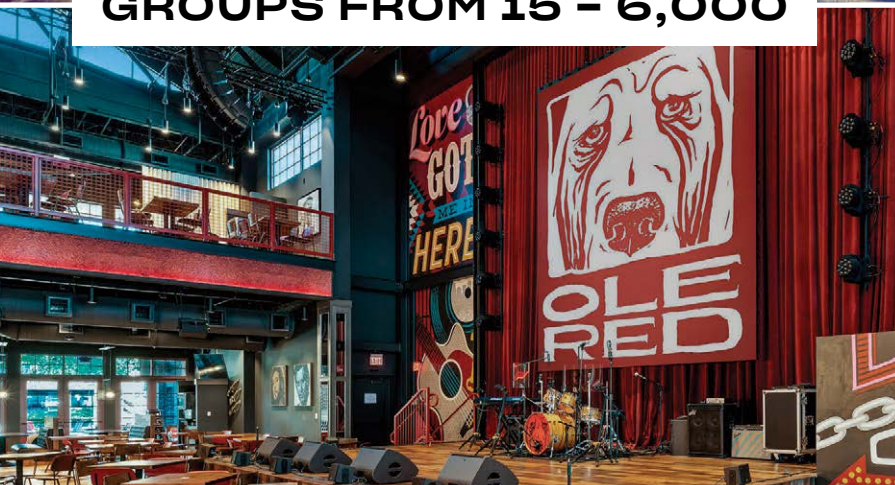
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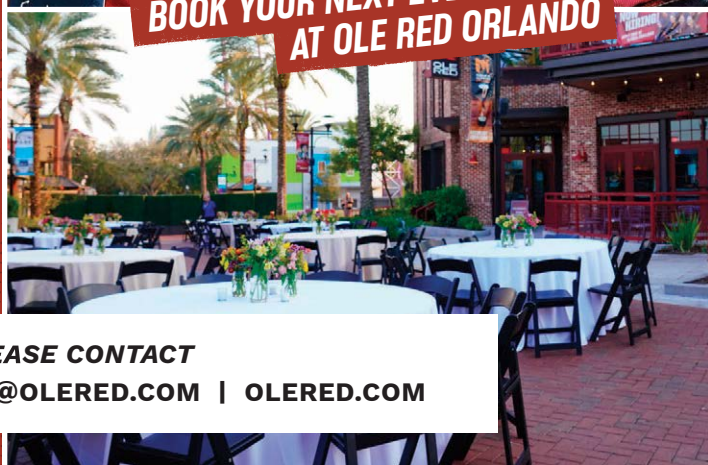
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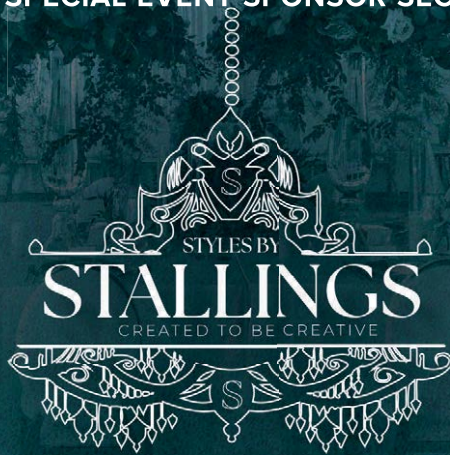
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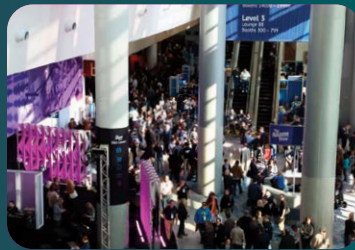
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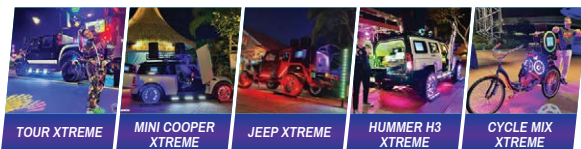


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A BIT OF COASTAL *Fiesta Flair*

By Amanda Nicklaus

IF YOU PASSED by The Pointe in Orlando, FL the last week of March, you would have noticed a lively energy. You would have heard people laughing and music playing. You would have seen the dusky sky punctuated by glowing neon balloons that were marked with little sombreros, balloons that read “Coastal Fiesta Block Party.” You probably would have wanted to join the celebration.

2023's Opening Night Party for Catersource + The Special Event was held in the open air, welcoming attendees to the warmth of Florida. The Pointe, an outdoor mall, blocked out a green space, The Hampton Social, and Kavas Tacos + Tequila, letting attendees gather for activities, entertainment, and conversation across a unique mix of spaces.

In line with the theme, attendees were offered sparkling rosé as well as margarita luge shots, where the shot was poured down a Day of the Dead-style ice sculpture, chilling the liquid as it reached the cup waiting at the

bottom. Attendees could also grab a bottle of beer from a beer burro (a small burro saddled with small containers of beer). Food offerings included mini smashburgers, mini Maine lobster rolls, brussels sprouts, goat cheese crostinis, chicken flautas, a taco bar, and a variety of sweets, including lemon bars, snickerdoodle cookies, and chocolate chip cookies.

Meanwhile, a vibrant energy pulsed through the air as attendees mingled and tried different activities. Whether it was posing for photos in a vintage Volkswagen bus, getting their faces bedazzled, posing with llamas, getting caricatures painted on wine corks, posing with a retro-costumed beauty, painting a mural (which was transported to each consecutive event), or enjoying a variety of live music, there was fun all around.

After the first day of sessions, the Opening Night Party was a great way for attendees to relax, make new friends, and get inspired! ●

All photos courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

CONFETTI



Attendees could get their faces bedazzled.



The adorable Roby Tannenbaum, head event coordinator at The Venue, Fort Lauderdale, gets bedazzled for festive flair.





(Above) Airstar balloons could be seen lighting up the evening sky.



(Left) A cute beer burro served attendees bottles of cerveza while capturing their hearts.

CONFETTI



(Above and below) An artist from Cork Toons captured attendees' likenesses on a wine cork for a little souvenir.



Immersive entrances are in, and the LED light curtain that greeted attendees into The Hampton Social was a hit (and a photo op).



Biophilic designs, like this decorative arrangement at the Opening Night Party, are trending.



...curtain that guided
...and a great photo op!).



Students of the WACO
theatre assembled onstage
to thank artistic directors
Tina Knowles-Lawson and
Richard Lawson.

Footers Catering Director of Sales & Marketing, Colbert Callen, partakes in
chicken flautas, served as part of the "Coastal Fiesta Block Party" theme.



...ent seen at the



Shining orbs suspended by macrame hangers
drew eyes upward.



A Day of the Dead ice sculpture served as an
interactive luge shot station.

CONFETTI



Attendee photos (this spread): Professionals from all sectors of the events industry had a blast celebrating new friendships and kicking off the week in style.





Mini Maine Lobster Rolls served up coastal flavor.



Margarita luge shots were poured down a Day of the Dead-style ice sculpture, chilling the shot as it reached the cup waiting at the bottom of the sculpture.



CONFETTI



Rosé and reposado were the beverages of the evening—or perhaps of the day, as encouraged by this neon sign!



Attendants dressed in retro clothing and makeup posed for a vintage postcard photo shoot.



Lively violin performers that engage and dance while playing beloved cover songs are trendy entertainment.



New friends, old friends, colleagues, and peers snapped photos all night to share online and to remember the fun.



(Above) Nothing says “fiesta” like a taco bar!



(Above and below) Good Times Roll provided a Volkswagen to match the Florida Sunshine Tour conference theme—and to give attendees a fun photo op!



AS SEEN IN... *Orlando*

There's nothing like starting the week at Catersource + The Special Event with a tour of prominent and unique venues in the destination of the year: Orlando. Over the course of the afternoon, attendees checked out four spots: USTA National Campus, The MEZZ, Regal Winter Park Village, and ICON Park.

USTA National Campus: The official home of the United States Tennis Association. Nearly 100 rentable tennis courts, four pickleball courts, and four padel (a racket sport similar to tennis that's rising in popularity) courts, hosting everything from large tournaments to corporate events to small outings—as long as events include a racket sport component. Catering is provided by local award-winning Orlando caterer, Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering.

The MEZZ: 7,000-square-foot space located in a high-rise in Eola Square. Features floor-to-ceiling windows, modern art decor, state-of-the-art audio-visual systems, and customizable LED lighting. Bonus VIP Room. Catering provided by local award-winning Orlando caterer, Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering.

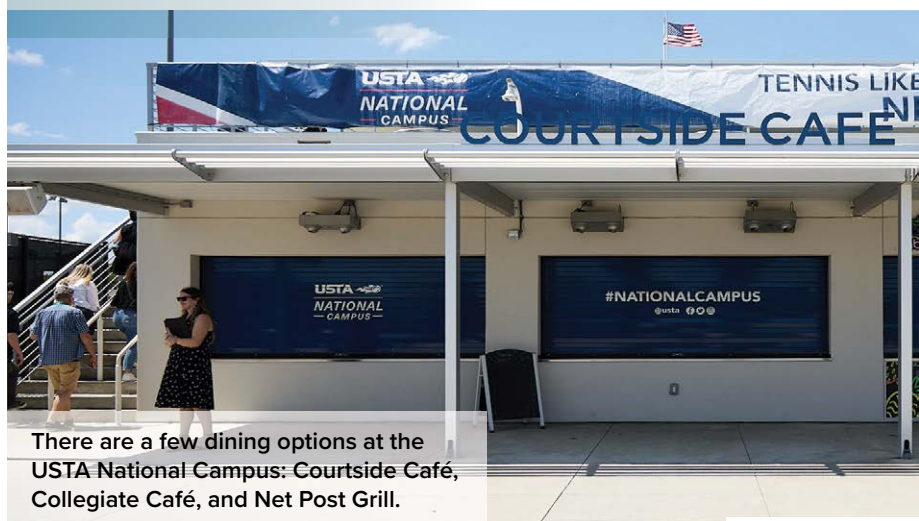
Regal Winter Park Village: During times when theaters are unoccupied, why not rent out the space as an event venue? With auditorium seating and a massive screen, meetings and presentations become a much more immersive and entertaining experience.

ICON Park: Over 40 bars, attractions, shops, and venues, including the lawn and the sky lounge, Madame Tussauds, Sea Life, and Museum of Illusions. Known for The Wheel, a 400-foot-tall observation Ferris wheel (which attendees had the chance to ride—a fantastic way to see the city of Orlando from above). Venue buyouts available. ●

— Amanda Nicklaus

All photos courtesy WASIO Faces/
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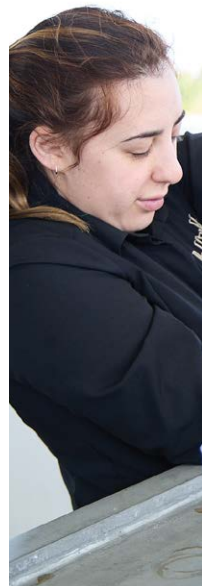
USTA NATIONAL CAMPUS



There are a few dining options at the USTA National Campus: Courtside Café, Collegiate Café, and Net Post Grill.

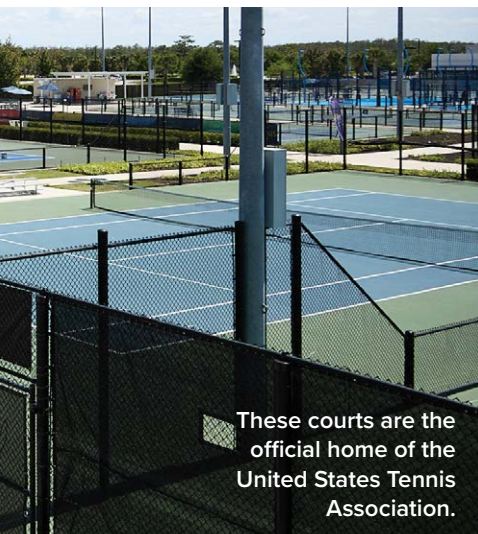


The sun was shining as attendees got their first taste of Florida!





Attendees were offered local craft brewed root beer for a refreshing beverage.

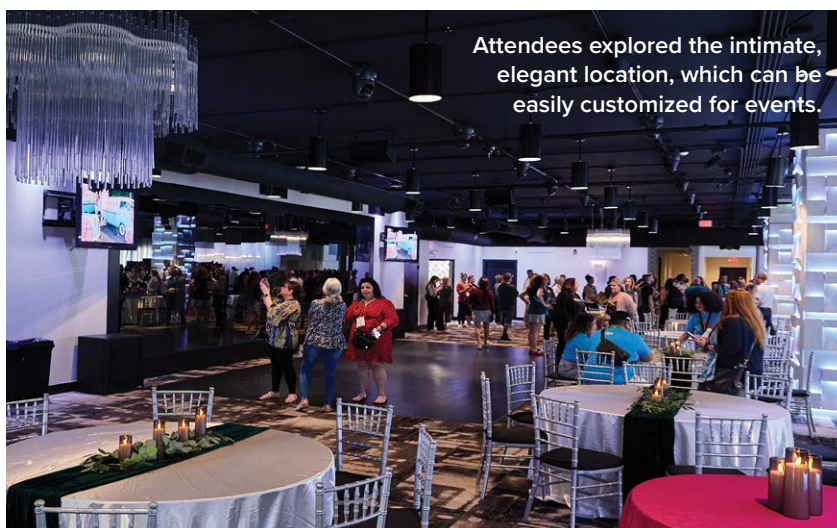


These courts are the official home of the United States Tennis Association.

THE MEZZ



The MEZZ provides a vibey, cozy event space, with ambient lighting and comfortable lounge furniture.



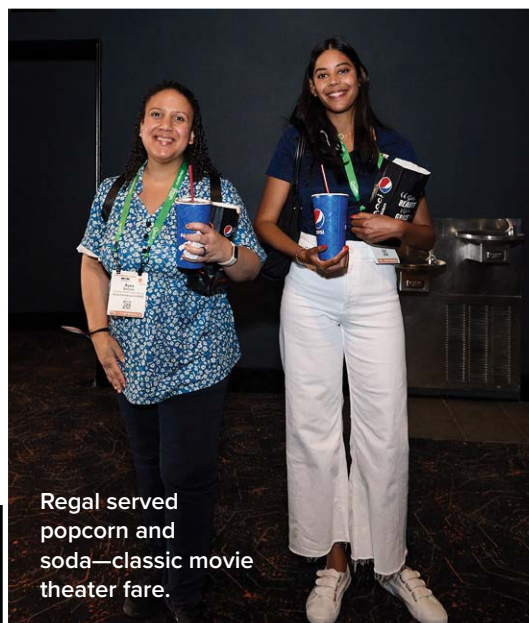
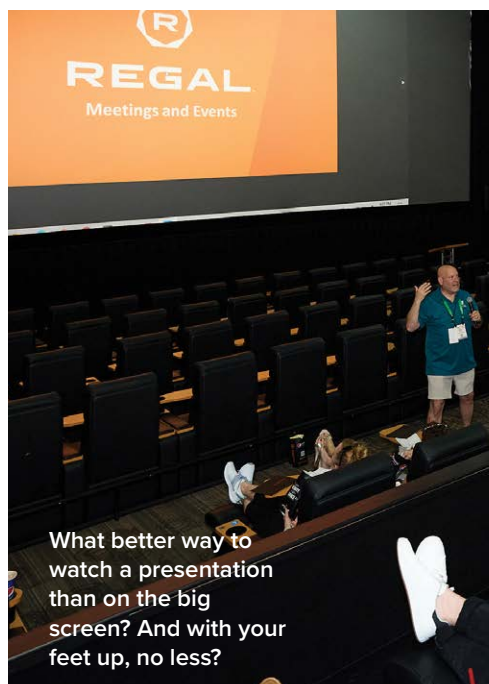
Attendees explored the intimate, elegant location, which can be easily customized for events.



Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering served tuna tacos with a wonton shell, tuna tartare, ponzu vinaigrette, and wakame.

AS SEEN IN... *Orlando*

REGAL WINTER PARK VILLAGE



(Above and above right)
Orlando—from 400 feet in the

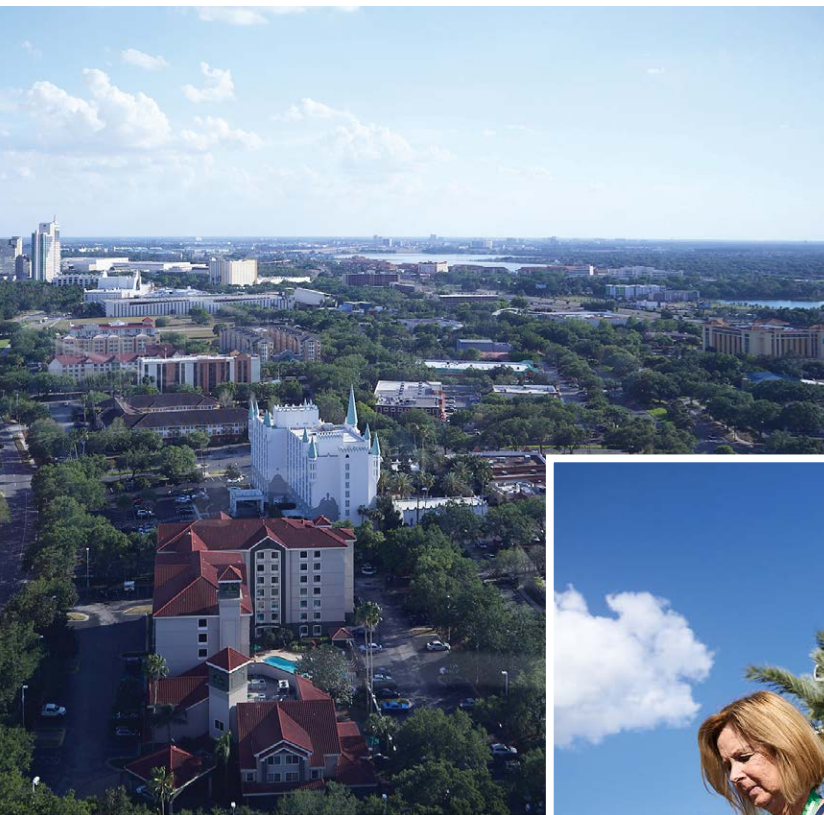
ICON Park



Macaroni and cheese balls were served at ICON Park.



Attendees wrapped up the day with a view of Orlando from inside The Wheel.



air.



In true amusement park style, attendees ate sliders slipped inside vibrant multi-colored buns.



STEAL THIS

Sometimes, minimalist florals combined with an array of textured and colored vases creates a visually pleasing ensemble.



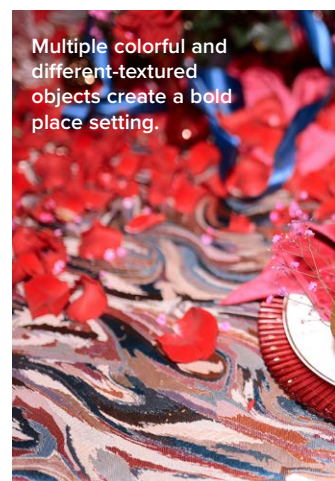
These bundles of roses, hydrangeas, and baby's breath are accentuated by smaller rose arrangements and individual roses at each tablescapes competition place setting.



An analogous color scheme composed of an array of textures from florals, candles, and linens gives this tablescapes a whimsical, romantic feel.



The Floral Design Lab held beautiful, bright arrangements, like these pieces with multi-textured pinks and greens.



Multiple colorful and different-textured objects create a bold place setting.



Biophilic designs like this lamp draped in roses and ferns are quite popular.



The Keynote Stage was filled with vibrant hydrangeas and greenery by local Orlando florist Bluegrass Chic.



All photos courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos unless otherwise noted

FLORAL DESIGNS

We all know how drastically florals can improve an event, and the florals at this year's Catersource + The Special Event were no exception. Between a floral Tablescaping Design Competition for attendees, an Event Escape room that featured a Floral Design Lab, some great sessions on

floral trends and know-how, and extravagant arrangements across the CS+TSE stages, there were blossoms around every corner. Take some inspiration from the gorgeous floral designs at this year's Catersource + The Special Event! ●

— Amanda Nicklaus

The simple florals in this tablescape are enriched by a variety of textures: a highly detailed tablecloth design, wooden centerpieces, ornately decorated glassware surfaces, and glittery plates. Photo courtesy Special Events Staff



As event planning professionals, we focus so much on the details of our work that we can forget to take care of ourselves.

Coping Strategies for Event Planning Professionals

By Charessa Sawyer

The events industry is fun, vibrant, and filled with exuberating moments for everyone to remember. We thrive off room reveals and amazing reviews by our clients and their guests, and we create lasting experiences for a lifetime of conversation. Yet, smiles and laughter do not always come to everyone experiencing these amazing events.

The events industry ranks significantly high as one of the most stressful industries in the U.S. Specifically, event planning is ranked number six as the top stressful job in the world for the seventh consecutive year. As event planning professionals, we focus so much on the details of our work that we can forget to take care of ourselves. We may feel pressure to be perfect and to make sure everything runs smoothly, which can lead to stress, burnout, and even anxiety or depression. In this context, therapy can be an important tool to help process these feelings and should be considered as a service for event professionals.

Therapy provides a safe and confidential space where we can talk about our thoughts, feelings, and experiences without fear of judgment or criticism. This can be especially valuable for event planners, who may not have many opportunities to talk openly with those who understand the industry's unique challenges and pressures of the job. Event planners, caterers, florists, photographers, and even DJs experience fast-paced, high-stress environments that require them to perform and problem solve with little preparation, hence the importance of strategies and tools to manage emotions.

Coping strategies help manage stress, increase resilience, and improve our overall well-being. Techniques such

as mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, and relaxation methods like yoga or meditation are key strategies that [Event Therapy™ Network](#) shares with event professionals. In addition to processing coping strategies, therapy affords the opportunity to identify triggers and challenge negative thought patterns or beliefs that may be contributing to stress or anxiety.

Moreover, therapy can help event planners gain perspective on their work and develop a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in their career. By exploring their values, goals, and motivations through therapy, event professionals can gain clarity and focus, and develop a sense of empowerment in their work. This can lead to greater job satisfaction, better relationships with colleagues and clients, and a stronger sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Event Therapy™ has developed a network that educates, empowers, and encourages mental wellness for the events industry. Event planning professionals should consider utilizing therapy because it can help them manage stress, increase resilience, improve their overall well-being, and gain perspective on their work. By taking care of ourselves, we can better serve our clients, colleagues, and the events we plan, and enjoy a more rewarding and fulfilling career. ●

Editor's Note: We are so thankful to have had Ms. Sawyer, a certified event planning professional (owner of SC Visionary Planning & Production Services) as well as licensed therapist (owner of Event Therapy™ Network), provide sessions and lead meditation in our Wellness Lounge at Catersource + The Special Event 2023. Here's hoping she agrees to return in 2024!

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