

WINTER 2022

# catersource®

## State of the Industry 2022



Catering up in the air {34}

'Tis the season for 2023 budgeting {44}

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EDUCATION, NEWS, PRODUCTS & IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL CATERERS

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### Behind the Cover

This month's cover comes from Colette's Catering & Events and features a beautiful roasted beet salad with pistachio-sorrel pesto, goat cheese, shaved celery, mache, kumquat, and calamansi vinaigrette. Photo courtesy Jennifer Fujikawa Photography

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## Continue to Educate

**I HAD A WONDERFUL** opportunity to immerse myself into two events in the fourth quarter of 2022 that truly capped my year. The first—a high end gala in Los Angeles. My good friend Roy Porter invited me to tag along (he was consulting) and help with set up, day of, and strike. I couldn't say yes fast enough, because for me, it's my continuing education. Like, how can I be a good conference director, a good editor, if I don't keep myself active in the industry I'm working in? There were a lot of eye-opening moments at that event, many that'll never go to print. I covered some of the (printable) highlights in our sister publication, *Special Events*. As I mentioned in the piece, I did everything from trying to get electrical to a couple of hotboxes, took a turn at a slider station, hauled garbage, offered some very cogent points when we were setting 650 cheeseboards...and managed to be a complete boss mom by barging into Andra Day's dressing room looking for 150 missing knives. Check it out at the end of this issue when you have a moment!

I also was able to attend, once again, the Leading Caterers of America Executive Summit in Cincinnati, this year hosted by Funky's Catering. This is a high-level meeting of some of the best and most successful catering and events companies in the U.S. and beyond, and the ideas and opinions that fly throughout those three days are golden. While many of the discussions during the day are too confidential to repeat, we were able to encapsulate a discussion about the state of corporate catering into our State of the Industry report, beginning on page 14.

Funky's evening events, which we'll cover in our Spring issue, were given rave reviews by the members of [Leading Caterers of America](#).

What I'm putting forth here mostly is that—you can't stay in your own silo as catering and event planners. You need to step out, see how other people are doing things, learn from your peers, and enrich your work life. The things I have taken home from these two events will stay with me for a long time.

I encourage you to think about how you can enrich your work life in 2023. Of course, I'd love to see you at [Catersource + The Special Event](#) or [Art of Catering Food](#) in March 2023. For more info on those industry-wide events, turn to page 8.

From all of us here at Catersource, we wish you the happiest of holidays and a profitable New Year!

Kathleen Stoehr  
Director of Community & Content Strategy

# the **ART** of CATERING FOOD

March 26-27, 2023

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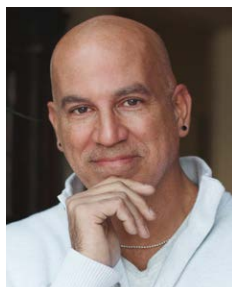
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# Winter 2022 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** puts a spotlight on the state of the industry in terms of employee engagement



Industry expert **Fausto Pifferrer** shares a new way to give in the form of the "You Can Have Mine Initiative"



Kitchen guru **Robin Selden** breaks rules when it comes to the Kitchen Brigade System



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** unveils the seven ways to get your clients to like you

*What do you think of this issue? Like it? Love it? Have something to contribute to our website? We'd love to hear from you. Write us at [editor@cattersource.com](mailto:editor@cattersource.com).*

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# Conference updates

**Clear your calendars for Orlando & Catersource / AOCF**

Quarter 1, 2023. In less than three short months, we will all be together in sunny Orlando, Florida for Catersource + The Special Event—but also Art of Catering Food! There's a lot happening that last week in March and we are here to break it all down for you and why you need to clear your calendar and book a flight—*STAT!*



**March 26 • 27 | Orlando, FL**  
Orange County Convention Center

## Art of Catering Food

When last we visited Art of Catering Food (AOCF), it was 2019 and we were in the beautiful city of New Orleans, LA on the cusp of Mardi Gras. AOCF 2020 was planned and set for August in Philadelphia...

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and then, *whump*. Well, we all know what happened next. But the best news of all is that AOCF is back and we are thrilled to again be partnering with the International Caterer's Association to bring attendees a two-day intensive that focuses closely on catered events and the food and logistics it takes to make them so memorable.

All the hallmarks of AOCF are in place: the quick burst Round Robins that keep attendees moving, tasting, and learning; the short chef-driven sessions that focus on technique, problem solving, and unique ideas; the tasty Lunch & Learn that pairs high culinary concepts with a solid learning experience plus networking; a venue tour, allowing you to see how a mega-caterer organizes and staffs its lead facility; and finally, a captivating keynote (see sidebar) that will open your minds to ideas you may never have considered for your own kitchens.

## Catersource Conference & Tradeshow: It's all here!

In its 31st year, Catersource Conference & Tradeshow continues to be the premier gathering for professionals who have built their careers in the catering and events industries. Three days of conference sessions coupled with two full days of tradeshow exhibitions, an opening and closing general session, awards ceremony, a leadership luncheon, and three evening events will keep attendees invigorated! All the major industry associations will

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be in attendance, conference sessions will allow attendees to keep their accreditations current, and “surprise and delight” installations are in the works to keep your social posts snappy. It’s all here in Orlando March 27–30. *Here’s a look at a few details!*

## Closing general session speaker: Chef Art Smith

**Chef Art Smith** is the executive chef and co-owner of Blue Door Kitchen & Garden in Chicago, Southern Art & Bourbon Bar in Atlanta, Art & Soul in Washington DC, Art Bird & Whiskey Bar at Grand Central Terminal in New York City, and Chef Art Smith’s Homecomin’ Florida Kitchen & Southern Shine Bar at Disney Springs at the Walt Disney World Resort.

Smith has received two James Beard Foundation awards, the culinary profession’s highest honor, and has cooked for some of the world’s most famous celebrities. In 1997, Smith became the personal, day-to-day chef to Oprah Winfrey, a position that lasted 10 years. Smith now coordinates and cooks for special events all around

the world. He is a frequent guest on the Food Network, the Cooking Channel, and Bravo.

Smith is the author of “Back to the Table”; “Kitchen Life: Real Food for Real Families”; “Back to the Family”; and “Art Smith’s Healthy Comfort,” with a focus on healthy cooking and healthy living.

Chef Smith is the founder of Common Threads, a non-profit organization teaching low-income children to cook wholesome and affordable meals since 2003. He believes that through hands-on cooking and introducing children to fresh foods we can help prevent childhood obesity, reverse the trend of poor eating habits, and learn about diversity and tolerance through the celebration of our cultural differences and our commonalities.

In 2015 Smith launched a non-profit organization, Reunion, Florida Garden and Kitchen School, in Madison, FL at the historic Wardlaw-Smith House near his childhood home in Jasper, FL. At Reunion students of all ages receive free classes on Southern cooking traditions, horticulture, and weather forecasting via Weather Stem systems.

In 2008 Smith received an Honorary MBA Degree, awarded by the Dedman School of Hospitality at Florida State University. On May 19, 2012 Smith received an Honorary Doctorate of Culinary Arts from Johnson and Wales University, North Miami Campus.

Smith lives in Chicago, IL and Jasper, FL with his husband, renowned artist Jesus Salgueiro. Catersource is delighted to have Chef Smith onstage at its closing general session on Thursday morning, March 30.



**Chef Art Smith**

## Diced competition 2023

**The annual Diced competition will be held on the Culinary Main Stage on March 29, and we are currently seeking a few more chefs to compete in this lively event.** Six chef competitors will receive a mystery box of ingredients, a pantry of staples, and 30 minutes to complete a delicious task to delight our three judges and be crowned the winner. Will it be a short plate? Appetizer? Something seasonally apropos? No one knows until the chefs hit the stage.

As always, a variety of boards, small plates, and other vessels will be set out. Once the “start bell” has been sounded chefs will be able to open their mystery boxes, grab their plating pieces, access additional ingredients from the pantry, refrigerators, or shelves and begin work. It’s fast paced, fun, and a little bit of smack talk is always expected!

One thing that hasn’t changed, however—a cash prize for the winner and one for the “audience favorite!” Email [Kathleen.stoehr@informa.com](mailto:Kathleen.stoehr@informa.com) for details or to express your interest in competing.



BRYCE CHERVEN FROM STRATEJE FOURTEEN (NOW WITH FOOTERS CATERING) WAS ONE OF THE SIX COMPETITORS IN LAST YEAR'S DICED COMPETITION. PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY



THE JUDGES FOR LAST YEAR'S DICED COMPETITION WERE (FROM FAR LEFT): KEYNOTE SPEAKER CHRISTINA MATTEUCCI (DAVID BEAHM EXPERIENCES), DUVAL WARNER (RANCH 45), AND CHRIS TAYLOR (WHO WON THE 2021 COMPETITION). PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY

## Catersource complete: We are family!

**The backbone of this event, of course, is the stellar education presented each year and the exhibit hall floor offering the latest in catering and event equipment, supplies, and tastes.** This year, expect over 100 classes to choose from via the Catersource-only pass just in the conference area alone, Tuesday through Thursday, March 28–30. With a combined The Special Event pass, you double your opportunity for learning. Want a look at the conference schedule? Go to <https://schedule.catersource.com/> and get your look. After January 06, most sessions will be scheduled into their



Chef Yia Vang

## Meet Yia Vang, AOCF Keynote

One of seven siblings, Chef Yia Vang was born in a Thai refugee camp where he lived until his family resettled in central Wisconsin. A trained chef who started his career working as a dishwasher, Vang worked at many top restaurants in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area before starting Union Hmong Kitchen, which was nominated for a James Beard Award in 2022 (Vang was also nominated for Best Chef—Midwest in 2022). Vang uses food to tell a story and believes that every dish has a narrative. Through sourcing what's in season and combining local traditions with those from his family and cultural traditions, Vang brings Hmong flavors to American palates and invites people to change how they think about food by considering the influences in each bite.

Vang is the host of Twin Cities Public Television's *Relish* series and has been featured on National Geographic and CNN's *United Shades of America*. Among other accolades, he was the cover story of the May 2020 issue of "Bon Appetit" magazine, competed on the *Iron Chef* reboot on the Food Network, and is the host of the new Outdoor Channel series, *Feral*, which debuted on November 28, 2022.

Art of Catering Food is delighted to welcome Chef Vang to the stage on Monday morning, March 27.



## CONFERENCE NEWS (CONTINUED)

final time/date. You can also search by track, conference, association, and accreditation.

On Wednesday and Thursday, head to the exhibit hall floor for opening and closing general sessions plus classes on the Ignite stage—and more surprises and networking opportunities along the way.

As for the exhibit hall, 2023 will tout a combined show floor, mixing The Special Event exhibitors with Catersource exhibitors for less of a “church and state” feel. After all, we are family—events and catering are hand and glove. We are a perfect fit and stronger together!



CHEF NETTIE FRANK DELIVERED TWO SESSIONS ON THE CULINARY EXPERIENCE STAGE LAST YEAR: *INFUSE YOUR BUSINESS WITH CBD AND MIMICS & MISHAPS: CHURROS A LA MICKEY & OTHER CATERING MAGIC*. PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY



CHEF JASON SUTTON WITH FOOTERS CATERING WHIPS UP SOME *LATE NIGHT NOSHES* IN 2022. PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY



THE EXHIBIT HALL FLOOR OFFERS THE LATEST IN EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES. PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY



THE SAMPLES ARE ALWAYS A HIGHLIGHT ON THE CATERSOURCE TRADESHOW FLOOR. PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY



KING'S HAWAIIAN SERVES UP A FEW BITES ON THE TRADESHOW FLOOR DURING LAST YEAR'S CONFERENCE. PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY



CHEF ROBERT MITCHELL WITH BOLD CATERING & DESIGN TALKS PASTRIES LAST YEAR ON THE CULINARY EXPERIENCE STAGE. PHOTO COURTESY WASIO PHOTOGRAPHY

## Registration is open!

If you are reading this article prior to January 06, quick!, head over to <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/> and register now for the lowest prices available. After January 06, we start our Early Bird rate (still a great deal). Hotel and travel information can also be found via the navigation bar at the top of the screen. 

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# Catersource State of the Indust



# ry 2022

## Caterers continue to grapple with staffing and supply chain shortages, **while corporate catering begins its comeback.**

*By Amber Kispert*

THE DETROIT ATHLETIC CLUB MADE ITS CORPORATE EVENT COMEBACK IN 2021 WITH THE RETURN OF ITS BACK TO THE CLUB WEEKEND (A 2022 ACE AWARDS FINALIST). THE WEEKEND-LONG EVENT FEATURED A SERIES OF LIQUOR TASTINGS, SPECIALIZED DINNERS (INCLUDING A SEAFOOD FRENZY), AND ACTIVITIES. PHOTO COURTESY DOUG COOMBE

It's been a roller coaster for the catering and events industry over the past two years. Caterers watched as events disappeared off their calendars while being forced to lay off their staff in 2020, only to be faced with a record-setting number of events just two years later without enough employees to staff them. The economy surged in 2022...until it didn't. With so many ups and downs, starts and stops, it's been a challenge for caterers to get their footing. But as everyone knows, caterers are experts at finding innovative ways to solve any problem.

"Our industry has worked tirelessly to rise above every challenge thrown our way by the skin of our teeth," says Steve Sanchez (JDK Group). "We've proven that our kind, catering professionals, are resilient, creative, and innate problem solvers. It is evident that when our industry comes together, we pull through."

### Survey says

Earlier in the third quarter, Catersource released a survey to our readership. Surveys are always a good place to start an end of the year report. Let's first look at a few of the simple questions we asked, and some of the interesting responses we received, and then we will move into







GRAZING STATIONS CONTINUED TO BE POPULAR THROUGHOUT 2022. SHOWN: A FALL GRAZING STATION FROM THE JDK GROUP. PHOTO COURTESY MARK BUCKWALTER PHOTOGRAPHY

the guts of the beast—our annual SOI (as we call it in house): the Catersource State of the Industry 2022.

### Who responded to our survey?

**47% described their company as a caterer.**

**43% identified as Owner/CEO;**

**15% as operations (manager, director, or executive).**

Interestingly, 22% noted that they have been in the events industry for 10–19 years, 29% have been in the industry for 20–29 years, and an impressive 32% have worked in the industry for more than 30 years.

### Top event types

In a “select all that apply” style question, the top event types were “corporate” with 77% of all companies winning some type of contract from a corporation in 2022, and in a close second were social events (Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, Quinceañeras, birthdays, and anniversaries, etc.) with 74% followed by weddings (66%). Association events (59%) came next with fundraisers (56%) rounding it out.

The ambiguous category of “other” which included fill-ins such as festivals, memorials/funerals, culinary trainings, retirements, institutional, student banquets, executive dinners, customer appreciation, concessions/vending, academic/school, concerts, sporting events, military protocols, golf outings, team building, film and television, and conventions brought up the tail at 25%.

“In the past a lot of catering companies just focused on the corporate side, but the pandemic made them pivot to the social side as well,” says Clint Elkins (SB Value).

The most popular size for a catering job is 1–99 (71%) with 100–249 (68%) coming in a close second.

### Pre- versus post-COVID event numbers

While word on the street says that many event and catering pros are far busier than they were pre-COVID, the survey said otherwise. Pre-COVID, 31.74% selected 250 events or more as their top number contracted. In our post-COVID survey, however, 27.65% selected 250 or more events and 1–49 events took the top spot with 30.72%. Interestingly though, Post-COVID saw the same response for 1–49 with 30.72%, responses for 50–99 events stayed fairly stagnant pre- (17.75%) and post-COVID





**“Our industry has worked tirelessly to rise above every challenge thrown our way by the skin of our teeth.”**

**—Steve Sanchez**

2022 SAW THE RE-EMERGENCE OF CHEF-ATTENDED ACTION STATIONS. (ABOVE) BANANAS FOSTER CHEF STATION DURING BACK TO THE CLUB AT THE DETROIT ATHLETIC CLUB. PHOTO COURTESY DOUG COOMBE

(LEFT) CHEF TENDERED SHORT PLATE STATION FROM THE JDK GROUP. PHOTO COURTESY MARK BUCKWALTER PHOTOGRAPHY

(18.43%). There was an increase for 100-249 events pre-(19.80%) and post-COVID (23.21%).

### **Let's talk content**

Finally, we asked what types of content our readership is most interested in devouring. The biggest surprise was that safety and security was the least interesting of the 11 selections we offered.

What you want to know more about, however, are food and beverage trends, best practices, event trends, menu development, and business and professional development. We'll do our best to cover all of these in upcoming months through the pages of *Catersource* magazine, via our website, and through our live

content at Catersource Conference & Tradeshow in March 2023.

## **A wedding boom**

If anything could be used to describe 2022, it's that it was the year of the wedding boom. All year long, 2022 has been projected to see the largest number of weddings since 1984. In a webinar earlier this year with the International Caterers Association, Lee Ann Kelly with American Metalcraft suggested that there could be as many as 2.5 million weddings (1 billion meals served) in 2022 due to the number of weddings that were postponed in 2020 and 2021, combined with the number of new couples looking to tie the knot.

“The industry is healthy, busy, and exciting,” says Robin Selden, executive chef for Marcia Selden Catering & Events. “We are turning business away as we are having to close dates as not to compromise the quality of the events potentially by getting too hungry and taking on too much.”

In 2022 the catering industry saw a revenue of \$10.6 billion, [according to IBISWorld](#) and is expected to see an 11.4% increase as we move into 2023.

2022 saw the re-emergence of action stations, grazing tables, family-style, serve-yourself buffets, and guest experiences after two years of traditional plated meals and staff-attended buffets as a safety-precaution against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

“Chef attended action stations are really coming back full force,” said Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) during a Chef Roundtable earlier this year with the ICA, “and that also allows us to bring back all of the theatrics.”

Sanchez agrees. “I have noticed that creative and interactive stations are back on the rise,” he says. “Creating an environment where guests can connect with their food on an experiential level is becoming an





COLETTE'S CATERING & EVENTS SHOWCASES THEIR ANTIPASTO GRAZING STATION.  
PHOTO COURTESY BYC PHOTOGRAPHY

important factor for many clients.

"From elevated, over-the-top grazing displays to interactive chef-tendered stations with entertainment elements of live flame, theatrical characters, and choreographed meal service—clients are looking to wow their guests with unique culinary experiences."

How tastings are handled has also taken on a bit of a different look. Pre-pandemic, couples would set up private tastings where they could sample their way through a caterer's menu to get a first-hand account of what their guests will experience should they decide to sign on the dotted line. During the pandemic, tastings became more "grab-and-go" where couples would pick up a boxed version of their tasting menu, bring it home, and in some cases would have to reheat it and plate it themselves (with instructions from the caterer). Post-pandemic, however, is something entirely different. First, some caterers have a limited number of private tastings they offer per month because of their busy schedules, so it's in the best interest of the couples to start looking for their caterer earlier rather than later.

"It's a real challenge right now because we're busy," said Karen O'Connor (Daniel et Daniel) during the Chef Roundtable.

Whether or not to charge for a private tasting is a constant discussion among caterers as they're constantly weighing the return on investment: do they see a contract signed when offering a tasting? If it's a small guest list, does it make sense to cover the cost of a tasting?

A new type of tasting has started to emerge in the form of group tastings to scale back on the number of private tastings. For the group tastings, caterers will host a formalized event (for a fee) for multiple couples where they can sample several different menu options, while also getting to experience table settings, service, linens, and other décor elements to illustrate the full experience a caterer can provide.

"It's the whole package," said Jay Varga (JDK Group) during the Chef Roundtable, "and its more cost-effective."

"What we've noticed is that there's a lot of people who just need a little

bit of direction and don't really know what they need," Sutton said during the Chef Roundtable, "so they don't necessarily need a tasting, they just need to figure out what food is and how to organize a menu. By doing a group tasting, this'll hopefully weed out some of the tastings we don't need to be doing."

## Corporate making a comeback?

Corporate catering is essentially the last piece of the puzzle in the catering



(ABOVE) EXHIBIT OF COLETTE'S PORCHETTA PHOTOGRAPHY

(BELOW) CHAIRS FOR THOUSANDS THIS PAST YEAR ASSOCIATED WITH CELEBRATING WARMTH







EXECUTIVE CHEF STEFANO CIOCIOLA  
E'S CATERING & EVENTS SLICES  
A TO ORDER. PHOTO COURTESY BYC  
PHY

HARTWELLS PROVIDED MEALS  
SANDS OF WALMART ASSOCIATES  
SUMMER DURING THE WALMART  
S WEEK AND SHAREHOLDERS  
ON IN ARKANSAS. PHOTO COURTESY  
INC



industry's rebound. Weddings are happening, fundraisers are taking place (in some cases in a hybrid format), and people are gathering once again at social events. Even drop-off catering saw a slight uptick from 2019 to 2021, according to Carl Sacks (from 6.96% to 9.52%) during a session he presented on corporate catering during the LCA Executive Summit in November 2022. However, full-service corporate events (client/customer marketing events, employee morale events, and celebratory/milestone achievement events) largely remained the elusive white whale for much of 2022.

"Its recovery has not been as quick as we had hoped," said Sacks. "It's been problematic for us."

Between 2019 and 2021, the average percentage of business for full-service corporate catering dropped from 29.06% to 16.29%, according to Sacks. The dramatic drop in business can be attributed to the pandemic, the rise in at-home workers, and the layoffs that continue to plague the corporate world.

"We're just starting to pick up and they're laying off people," Sacks said. "How do we shift and get ready for these inevitables and still make money?"

In 2022, corporate delivery catering has even started to struggle as

restaurants and ghost kitchens start to make a major play for office lunches.

"This was a great low hanging fruit business opportunity," Sacks said.

When looking at full-service corporate events, one of the biggest hurdles that caterers are currently facing (and will continue to face) is shorter and shorter turnaround times, most likely attributed to a constant flux in staffing.

"What the market is showing us is that it's such an on-demand market," said Kris Reinhard (Bold Catering and Design) during the session at LCAES. "They're calling us a week before for a 300-person event. When do those corporate clients feel comfortable planning an event six months ahead? That's just the window of our world right now, everything can potentially turn on a dime."

Caterers appear to have two different opinions of how to address this issue: on the one hand, it is the responsibility of caterers to "re-educate our clients," said Jeff Ware (Catering by Michaels) during the same session.

"There's always going to be someone who comes in at the last minute, but overall, we need to recalibrate our corporate clients' expectations."

On the flip side, however, some caterers see increased opportunity (and revenue) for expedited contracts.

"We need to tell them 'This is what I can do for you in a week's period of time' and then you come out looking good because of it and you get the sale," said David Haggerty (DSquared Hospitality Company) during the LCAES session. "Plus, if you're not having to work with someone for weeks on end, you're saving time and you're saving money."

"It kinda works for our industry right now quite honestly in a different kind of weird way."

Another emerging trend is that destination management groups are contracting with caterers for





CHEF-TENDERED FULLY LOADED STATION FROM THE JDK GROUP. PHOTO COURTESY MARK BUCKWALTER PHOTOGRAPHY



A MEDITERRANEAN GROUP. PHOTOGRAPHY

promotional events to help attract corporate clients back to their organizations.

Although full-service catered corporate events still have an uphill battle to climb, full-service catering isn't completely dead in the water. Some companies are willing to pay more for a catered lunch as an incentive for employees to come back into the office. One way that they are doing this is by switching from corporate delivery lunches in favor of full-service catered meetings and office events.

During Catersource + The Special Event (held in May in Anaheim), Thomas Whelan (Levy Restaurants) suggested several ways corporate meetings can be elevated beyond the traditional boxed lunch including:

- Draft coffee mobile bars
- Infused water stations
- Theme the meal to a holiday or season: have a Mexican buffet for Cinco de Mayo complete with decorations and a margarita station, for example, or have a tailgating party during football season
- Personalized bento boxes
- Bagel walls with hanging cream cheese pastry bags

- Draft beer truck
- An office bodega where employees can grab snacks throughout the day
- Dress up a buffet with chalkboards and menus

"Employers have had to step up and offer more for people to come back into the workplace," Clint Elkins (SB Value) says. "Lunches have been the biggest offering and there is a great need for that in a lot of major cities."

## Supply and demand

It's no secret that the supply chain has continued to thwart caterers at every turn. With consumer demand higher than ever, it seems as if everything is harder to get than usual. Some items are unavailable, while others sport exorbitant prices reflective of the current market status.

For caterers, these issues have been especially challenging to navigate while operating on such delicate profit margins. At the same time, they rely on purchasing inventory to provide clients with top-notch experiences.

"It has been frustrating to say the least, but things have gotten a lot better," says Elkins. "The good thing

is there is so much volume out there with jobs that caterers have been able to offer different items without a ton of push back."

Selden agrees that she is starting to see an improvement in supply, but prices are still a source of concern.

"I don't want to jinx us, but we aren't seeing it much now," she says. "Prices are through the roof, but we are able to get almost anything that we need now."

Recent supply chain slowdowns have multiple causes, including labor, transportation and container shortages, and inflation-fueled cost increases. The biggest contributor has obviously been the pandemic.

In the wake of supply shortages, caterers have had to get extremely creative with their solutions. For some, trimming down menus has been the best course of action, while others have had to put on their experimentation hats to find substitutions.

"The good news is that we're just getting super creative," Kelly said during the ICA webinar. "We're looking at different ways to serve typical dishes."



NEAN GRAZING STATION FROM THE JDK  
O COURTESY COURTNEY DUEPPENGISSER

**“This isn’t your father’s catering industry anymore. Companies that are looking at other ways to purchase products cheaper are the trend setters in 2023.”**

**—Clint Elkins**

Frozen foods have emerged as a pinch-hitter in the face of supply shortages. According to [new research](#) conducted by the American Frozen Food Institute to assess the operational landscape within the foodservice sector, respondents overwhelmingly reported that supply chain disruptions remain a significant problem when sourcing ingredients. Frozen food can be a particularly useful tool to help overcome this challenge. For example, AFFI’s research found that many operators are looking for ways to “future proof” their supply chain by ensuring their ingredients are

consistently available year-round and are further integrating frozen food into the mix. In fact, 40% of operators surveyed reported using more frozen food since the start of the pandemic.

The use of frozen ingredients and foods such as produce, seafood, and appetizers can help ensure year-round availability for products that may vary seasonally and, with a longer shelf life, can remain available for use for a longer period of time. Plus, with a growing consumer acceptance of frozen food and new flavor and taste innovations, there are myriad options to add to your menu that clients will enjoy.

Another creative approach to combatting the supply chain is farm partnerships for local ingredient sourcing.

“If you source everything in one place and the system fails, what options do you have?” said Nicholas Walker (Cobb Galleria Centre and Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre) during his 2022 Catersource + The Special Event session, *Culinary Supply Chain for Caterers, Stability through Farm Partnerships*. “We had to strengthen our supply chain because we weren’t getting the things that we needed.”

As we move into 2023, the supply chain won’t magically improve overnight, so creative solutions will continue to be the answer.

“A lot of it comes down to communication and planning,” Elkins says. “Caterers have been forced to look at other options for their purchases. Rather than just doing things like they always have they have been forced to look outside the box and find other solutions to help with rising costs and shortages.”

## People problems

Beyond supply shortages, staffing shortages continue to be one of the biggest issues in the catering and events industry.

To date, 3.5 million have left the U.S. workforce since March 2020 because of the pandemic, and 1.2 million of those were in the leisure and hospitality industry, according to Cathy Hardin (Instawork) during her 2022 session at Catersource + The Special Event (*Rethink Your Staffing Strategy: Practical Ways to Navigate Ongoing Labor Shortages*).

“Everyone is feeling the pain of people leaving the industry,” she said. “Additionally, there’s obviously the one challenge of getting staff, but there’s another challenge of getting that staff ready for their first shift.”

“It cleared the decks a bit,” said John Crisafulli (Behind the Scenes Catering & Events) during *Rethink Your Staffing Strategy: Practical Ways to Navigate Ongoing Labor Shortages*.

“It made it very clear who was in it, who liked hospitality, who liked customer service, and who enjoyed what they did and had the work ethic to put the time and effort in and who those people were who were just playing around the edges.”

As far as recruitment goes, caterers still rely heavily on referrals, but online job boards have also continued to be a great source of staff leads. Although culinary programs at colleges and universities have always offered great opportunities for recruitment, many caterers are even branching out into high schools now.

“Where are we not sourcing staff from? If there are humans there, we are sourcing staff from there,” said Ware during a 2022 session at Catersource + The Special Event (*Serving Up Staff: Optimize Business with Better People Operations*).

As important as recruitment is, caterers are also putting a closer focus on their company cultures, benefits packages, and employee wellness as a way to attract (and retain) the best candidates.

“There are more jobs available than there are workers to fill them and



if we approach it the same way, you're going to get the same results," said Anthony Lambatos (Footers Catering) during *Serving Up Staff: Optimize Business with Better People Operations*. "We can't sugar coat what the job is anymore, that's completely the wrong approach. You might get a few more bodies in the door, but you're creating more work for yourself on the backend.

"We need to be able to embrace the difficulty of the job because you're going to attract the people that are drawn to that. There are people who want to be Navy SEALs in this world." When hiring staff, it's also important to put a strong emphasis on a person's passion, rather than their skills necessarily.

"I hire for passion, willingness to learn, and resilience," Sanchez said during *Serving Up Staff: Optimize Business with Better People Operations*. "They must have a fire or spark for something, because we can train anyone. Give me a body and

I will teach them."

Labor shortages will most likely continue as we move into 2023, but many caterers are hopeful that it will start to turn around soon.

"It's super frustrating to see people who are qualified workers sitting at home collecting unemployment," Selden says. "We still struggle to build our team and find new talent but I truly believe that it will be turning around."

## A tech revolution

Technology continues to become increasingly important post-pandemic; everything from robotics to virtual tastings, to even TikTok are having a moment in the catering industry.

### Robotics

From cocktail-making to burger-flipping, many food and beverage businesses are beginning to discover the benefits of using robots to improve their productivity. According to [Fast Casual](#), they can automate

the food or beverage-making process, save money and human resources, enrich menus, make fewer mistakes, and reduce food waste.

According to GlobalData's latest report [Robotics in Travel and Tourism](#), the service robotics industry is set to register a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21.5% to reach \$216 billion in 2030, driven by investments across consumer facing industries. The overall robotics industry is set to grow from \$70 billion in 2022 to \$568 billion in 2030, says GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company.

### TikTok

For a lot of the events industry, social media (Instagram, Facebook, etc.) serves as a great marketing tool: it helps get your name out there and showcases the great work you have been turning out. TikTok, however, has made a vastly different impact on the catering and hospitality world.

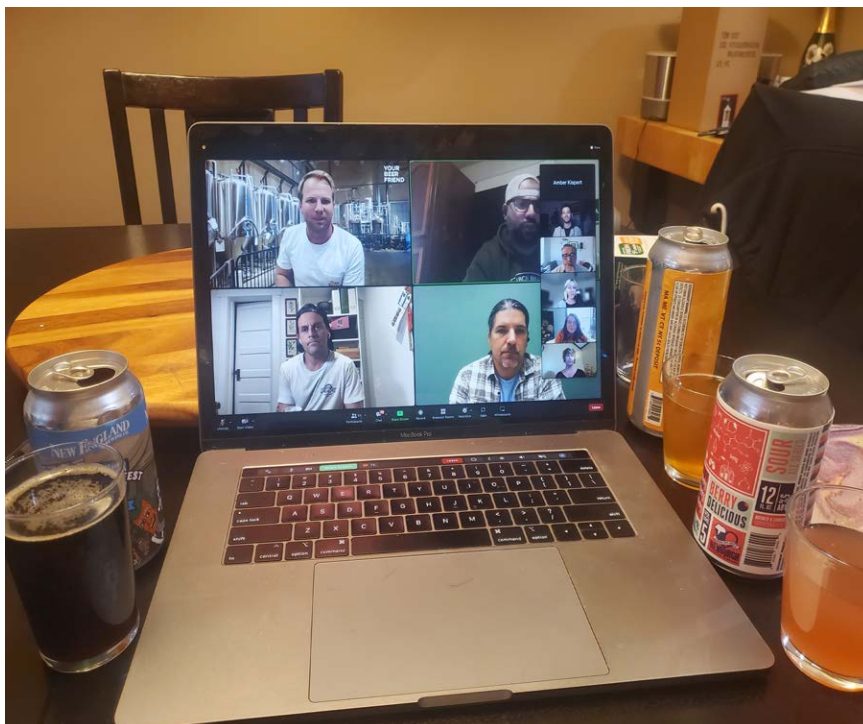
While TikTok can certainly be used for marketing and promotion purposes, it's also made a major play in the foodservice world by helping trends gain popularity. One great example of this is the [butter board](#) revolution that has swept events in recent months as more and more catering clients are asking for them as part of their cocktail hours or salad courses.

### Virtual reality

Virtual (or augmented) reality technology has made great strides over the past several years as a way to give guests and potential clients alike a more immersive experience.

One example is Meet Virtually, where participants can log into a pre-organized "event" through their smart phones, which are then placed into a simple cardboard VR viewer where they can tour a venue from the comfort of their own home. For those caterers who own and operate their own venues, this offers a great solution to help alleviate the pressure

MEET VIRTUALLY HELD A VIRTUAL OKOTBERFEST BEER TASTING EARLIER THIS FALL. PHOTO COURTESY CATERSOURCE STAFF



and time commitments of venue tours in the current event boom environment.

Another emerging trend in the realm of VR is immersive experiences at events where cartoon garnishes can interact with a cocktail or entrée with the simple scan of a QR code.

### Apps

There's also a [number of apps available](#) that can assist with seating maps, menu creation, and ordering.

"I can speak for the US Foods app that most of our clients use and rave about," says Elkins. "The ease of being able to order from your phone and track your products so you know when to have your staff come in has been a huge help."

## Survival through sustainability

Over the past couple years, sustainability has become the topic of conversation amongst catering and events professionals; everything from sustainability in staffing, sustainability in the kitchen ([turn to Page 46 for more on that](#)), and sustainability at events.

Amongst caterers, sustainability in the kitchen and at events has had the most attention put on it.

"Not to get controversial but as a mother we need to be looking out for our planet and implementing greener practices," Selden says. "We are very focused on being more sustainable and try to educate our team in these practices and the importance of them. Our clients really appreciate it!"

There are myriad ways that caterers are incorporating sustainability practices into their businesses. A few examples are: using eco-friendly cleaning products; eliminating plastics from disposables; buying sustainably and supporting local small businesses and farmers; opting for paperless documents (and if you must print use recycled paper); installing a water



MEET VIRTUALLY'S VR TOURS IS A FIRST OF ITS KIND PLATFORM TO HOST GROUP VIRTUAL TOURS. PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE VR GOGGLES, WHICH WORK IN CONSONT WITH A SMART PHONE FOR THE TOUR. PHOTO COURTESY CATERSOURCE STAFF

station in kitchens and venues to cut down on plastic water bottle use; using compostable materials; and partnering with local food recycling companies for waste collection following an event.

"Not everything about sustainability is about solving the world's problems, it's not about sacrifice," said Michael Dwork (VerTerra Dinnerware) during the *Sustainability Think Tank* held as part of Catersource + The Special Event in 2022. "It can be done in fun, colorful, interesting ways."

By being sustainable, caterers can also increase profits and decrease some of their costs.

"This isn't altruism at its core, its business functionality at its core," said Michael Stavros (M Culinary Concepts) during the *Sustainability Think Tank*. "It's financial coupled with a social and environmental piece."

Beyond their own sustainability practices, caterers must also make the effort to educate their clients so that they begin asking for more sustainable products and practices and it eventually becomes the norm.

"It's the opportunity to have a different kind of conversation," said Aurora Dawn Benton (Astrapto) during the *BEO Rethink* session at Catersource + The Special Event.





CATERERS ARE PUTTING A STRONGER EMPHASIS ON SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH THE USE OF ECO-FRIENDLY DISPOSABLE TABLEWARE PRODUCTS, SUCH AS DRIED PALM LEAF OR BETEL NUT.

“We need to be in a good place mentally to be a better coworker, employee, manager, and leader. It's a trickle up and down effect.”

—Robin Selden

“It’s an unbelievable rabbit hole that not one of us is qualified to go down alone,” Stavros said.

Implementing sustainability practices into your catering business may seem daunting on the surface and a huge undertaking, and it is, but it’s the small efforts that make all the difference.

“It’s not easy being green,” said Dana Buchanan (Primal Alchemy) during the *Leading the Scene by Keeping it Green* session at Catersource + The Special Event. “It can be overwhelming, but it starts with seeing what it is you can do and just starting—one thing at a time.”

Selden agrees that sustainability will be a major key in sustaining the catering industry.

“It’s important to take care of the health of our planet like we take care of ourselves,” she said. “There is way too much garbage and waste that we need to focus on reducing.”

## More focus on mental health

The pandemic effected caterers and event professionals unlike anything they had experienced before: employees were laid off, business evaporated off the books, and event professionals, CEOs, and owners

experienced high levels of stress, depression, and anxiety as they struggled with the unknown.

This unprecedented state of the world affected everyone mentally and emotionally in a different way, some more than others.

“We don’t like talking about mental health very much, we like to keep it behind the drapes,” said Charessa Sawyer with the Event Therapy Network during a webinar with the ICA on *Understanding Anxiety in the Catering Industry and Recognizing the Triggers*.

The pandemic helped the world realize that there is a desperate need for resources and that we can’t be ashamed to talk about it.

“I think it’s everywhere and not just the catering industry,” Selden says. “Taking care of your mind and body, getting annual checkups and screenings has become a priority to people after what we’ve been through.

“We need to be in a good place mentally to be a better coworker, employee, manager, and leader. It’s a trickle up and down effect.”

While the pandemic may have brought more awareness to mental health, much of the catering and events industry had finally reached its breaking point after having dealt with stress, anxiety, depression, substance

abuse, and so many other mental illnesses for a lot longer beyond just the pandemic.

“This is a very high-pressure industry. Every wedding reception is the most important day of someone’s life, and catering companies do hundreds of these a year,” says Elkins. “Being able to get away and decompress is at an all-time high. Long hours and weekend nights are a challenge in themselves; that is why I believe having an escape is crucial.”

But for many in the industry, having the escape, the time to decompress and focus on themselves is a luxury that isn’t often afforded, which is why it has become an important topic of discussion this year.

Sawyer and several other industry experts discussed the topic of mental health in the events industry during a Candid Conversations panel during Catersource + The Special Event. During the discussion, panelists touched on the need for perfectionism and the pressure and stress that comes along with that, competition, isolation, imposter syndrome, and self-criticism.

“We need to be honest with ourselves about what we’re feeling and what we need,” Sawyer said during the ICA webinar. “When you’re honest with yourself, that allows you to not put

yourself in situations that may cause additional stress.”

Throughout all the discussions on mental health as it relates to the catering and events industry, a single statement rings true: our caterers and event professionals spend so much time worrying about other people and not enough time focused on themselves and their own wellbeing.

“The one thing we don’t do in the industry is take care of ourselves,” said Fausto Pifferrer (Blue Elephant Events & Catering) during the Candid Conversation session. “We are so busy making that rainbow for everyone else that we go home to an abundance of things that are happening that nobody else knows.”

Now is the time to open the lines of communication; there isn’t any shame in discussing mental health anymore. It’s also the responsibility of managers and leaders to check in with their staff because even something

as simple as knowing that someone cares can make all the difference. By continuing these conversations, the catering and events industry can start to make strides towards healing.

“The impact of the last two years is far broader than our pocketbooks,” said Renee Adams (R. Collective) in an [article for Catersource](#). “The onslaught of feelings: worry, fear, anxiety, sadness, and disappointment brought with them a tornado of triggers for mental health disorders and substance abuse. Behind the zoom meetings, pivots, and petition signings, people are falling apart at the seams, and others of us are struggling to hold our worlds together entirely.

“Right now, at this moment, there are thousands of emotions to be owned, and not a single one needs to be handled with refinement. It is wholly and completely okay to show your cards for what they are, and while our situations may be different, that

doesn’t make them petty nor small, no matter what others are going through at the same time.”

## Let’s talk trends

Trends come and go in the catering and events industry faster than the speed of light, so it can sometimes be difficult to predict what will be trending in the year ahead, however, we’re sure going to try.

### *DIY catering kits are all the rage these days*

According to [Total Party Planner](#), as much of the population has switched to at-home (or hybrid-working) models, there has been an increase in demand for easy-to-use DIY options that can help throw a party or event without professional assistance. These pre-built packages usually include everything for the perfect party: food prep tools; tableware such as plates and cups; florals and other décor elements; and the menu of course—making hosting guests easier than ever.

### *Cheers to cocktail hour(s)*

As a possible response to the popularity of micro, intimate events during the pandemic, some clients are gravitating toward more informal, happy hour style gatherings, according to [Collective Concepts](#). Think small plates, food trucks, and bite-sized desserts or a gelato cart in place of the traditional plated or buffet meals. Why not consider an [Apertivo or Apericena style event](#), which was starting on an upward trend in 2022?

### *Smaller is sometimes better*

Small plates will be a continued focus for weddings, whether served via stations or as a multi-course plated tasting dinner.

“Small plates in their own right aren’t a trend,” according to the [ICA](#). “But they’re ever-evolving, so designing them in a way that incorporates a unique presentation is trendy! You can easily use trendy vessels like mini



BRUSSEL SPROUT TOAST HORS D'OEUVRES  
PRESENTED ON A GREENERY WALL OF GOLD  
SPOONS FROM THE JDK GROUP. PHOTO COURTESY  
MARK BUCKWALTER PHOTOGRAPHY





angled round melamine bowls or stainless-steel double wall bowls for cold treats like berries and ice cream.”

Hungry for more trends? For a taste of what food trends are in store for 2023, [turn to Page 46](#).

### **Corporate gets trendy**

According to Whelan, these are some of the big trends in corporate catering:

- “Regiception”: By turning the registration experience into a reception, you can help make guests feel excited for the event ahead.
- Mocktails: Though not necessarily new, there are so many amazing

spirit-free products that have hit the market over the past year, that the mocktail trend has really elevated to a new level. There is some serious mocktail mixology going on across the country.

“After staying indoors for so long and the lack of interacting with others, it has been so wonderful to see people getting back to the events they love and bringing such amazing enthusiasm,” says Whelan. “The innovation in our industry has also continued ramping up, with new solutions like passing appetizers on carts and chef-attended action stations that are helping us create truly special experiences for our guests.”

## **Looking to the future**

As we look into our crystal ball for 2023, we can expect the labor shortages to continue, and we can expect the supply chain to continue to give us a headache.

“This isn’t your father’s catering industry anymore,” says Elkins. “Companies that are looking at other ways to purchase products cheaper are the trend setters in 2023.”

As we move into another unprecedented year, it’s imperative that caterers have a better understanding of how much you and your business can handle.



(TOP) HEALTHIER OPTIONS (THAT INCORPORATE FRESH LOCAL VEGETABLES AND FRUITS) ARE IN DEMAND FOR WEDDINGS. IDEAS CAN INCLUDE CHARCUTERIE AND CRUDITÉ IN MINI MELAMINE POTS FOR A GARDEN VIBE OR A PEACH CAPRESE SALAD IN A MELAMINE "CAST IRON" SKILLET. PHOTO COURTESY INTERNATIONAL CATERERS ASSOCIATION. (ABOVE) ARTISTIC SMALL BITES WILL CONTINUE TO BE ON TREND IN 2023, SUCH AS THESE DESSERTS IN THE FORM OF AN AMUSE-BOUCHE FROM MARCIA SELDEN CATERING AND EVENTS. PHOTO COURTESY INTERNATIONAL CATERERS ASSOCIATION.

"If you think about a boxer in the late rounds of a match who is kind of wearied and staggered, the knockout punch is going to come by overextending themselves," Lambatos said.

Selden agrees. "We need to make sure to take amazing care of and to nurture our teams. At the end of the day, they are the most important part of your business and without them you'd be nowhere," she says.

It's also important to note that Generation Z (those born after 1996) is on its way to becoming one of the largest consumer groups. Currently, there are about 1.2 billion in the

Generation Z population globally (67 million of that in the U.S.), according to a session on beverage trends and Generation Z during Tales of the Cocktail 2022. By 2026, Generation Z is expected to become the largest U.S. consumer population with an estimated \$150 billion in spending power in the US alone compared to \$200 billion for millennials currently. So, it's definitely in catering companies' best interest to better understand Generation Z and what they're looking for from the industry.

"Since they are literally 'technoholics' (trust me I have 20-year-old twins) you better learn to speak their technology language and be okay with Facetime, texting, Snapchat, and the like," says Selden. "They don't read their emails and don't want to have to. They want quick solutions and not a lot of options and choices. Don't give them a 10-page proposal as they won't read that either. Be direct, get to the point, and make sure you set their expectations and they set yours. They are smart, savvy, and want their opinions heard and want to be a part of the process in a collaborative way."

On the top of the list for what Generation Z values, expect sustainability, technology, adventurism, and inclusion.

So, are you ready for 2023?

"The most important thing that we do as caterers (in my opinion) is we make people feel good and special and make delicious memories for them so keeping that alive and present throughout the year is hugely important," says Selden.

"Relationship building is a key ingredient to our success as an industry." 



By Amber Kispert

JAPENGO'S WATERMELON  
FEATURING TY-KU  
LIQUOR, FRUIT  
COCONUT WATER  
HYATT REGENCY MAUI

# A Tropical Escape

**Just because Jack Frost has a frigid grip ahold many areas of the world, doesn't mean you can't sip your way to a bit of sunshine and warmth.**

Cocktails have long helped aficionados transport themselves to different times and locales.

"A cocktail is a postcard from a place and time—a martini could take them to the 1920s in an art deco bar in London, a Manhattan can take them to 19th century New York, a Sazerac could take them to New Orleans, and a mojito could take them to the Caribbean," said Jacob Briars (Bacardi) during Tales of the Cocktail 2021. "Cocktails have always been to some extent an escapist opportunity—an escape from the grind of the day to day—but they also give you the ability

to travel without ever leaving your seat."

And nothing says "escape" quite like a tropical cocktail.

"Tropical drinks began as an homage to the places soldiers were seeing...blending multiple rums, citrus, baking spice, and sweeteners into standard recipes," says Carl Anderson with Sugar Beach Events on Maui. "Tropical drinks (like Pina Coladas, Daiquiris, Mai Tais) have the ability to evoke an 'I'm at the beach' feeling."

## Rum takes the cake

"More often than not, rum is the primary spirit in tropical drinks," Anderson says. "Due to the many styles of rum, it can either be a bold flavor or hang out in the background, and that flexibility makes it a great option for tropical drinks."



ELON SOJU (COLLINS)  
SOJU, WATERMELON  
FRESH LIME JUICE, AND  
ER. PHOTO COURTESY  
AUI RESORT AND SPA



BERRY SPA SIPPER FEATURING RASPBERRY PUREE, GRAPEFRUIT JUICE, CRANBERRY JUICE, SODA WATER, SLICED CUCUMBER, AND FRESH MINT. PHOTO COURTESY OREGON FRUIT PRODUCTS

“Before you even pour the first ounce of alcohol, tropical drinks offer escapism visually with their pineapple mugs, bouquets of mint, and flaming fruit.”

— CARL ANDERSON, SUGAR BEACH EVENTS

However, tropical cocktails can take on completely different personalities depending on the style and type of rum that is used. White rum, for example, has very little flavor, so it's perfect for daiquiris and Cuba Libres where the rum should be more subtle and the mixers should be the star, but on the other side of the coin a dark rum provides the perfect molasses flavor for a Mai Tai or rum punch. “Often, several different styles of rum are used in any given cocktail,” says Anderson.

Other ingredients that shine through in tropical cocktails:

“Bright juices like lime, pineapple, and passionfruit are very common in tropical drinks—that keeps the drink light and refreshing. Coconut in various forms is also a heavy hitter in tropical cocktails due to its heavy aromatics and quintessential beach flavor.”

With so many tropical drinks utilizing the same spirit, and many of the same ingredients, you may think there would be a lot of overlap between them, but each offers something unique.

“I have to say it is easier today than ever with all of the various iterations

of flavors available; both with spirits as well as the other ingredients,” Anderson says. “It’s like walking into Home Depot and having to build a house different than other people using any of the items there. No problem. I am fortunate to live in a time of culinary innovation and the availability of products that heretofore were unobtainable.”

### MAI TAI

*Photo and recipe courtesy Carl Anderson, Sugar Beach Events*

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 oz Rhum J.M. XO
- ½ oz Smith & Cross Jamaican Rum
- ¾ oz Pierre Ferrand Dry Curacao
- 1 oz fresh lime juice
- ¾ oz Orgeat

**METHOD**

Combine all ingredients in a mixing tin with ice. Shake to combine. Strain over fresh ice in a highball glass.



# Know Your

## The basics:

### LIGHT RUM

Also known as white rum or silver rum, this style is aged in oak barrels and then filtered to remove color.

**Color:** Clear

**Tasting Notes:** Nearly flavorless

**Suggested Cocktails:** Cuba Libre (rum, Coke, and lime), Daiquiri, Mojito, or Piña Colada

### GOLD RUM

As rum mellows in barrels over time, it takes on amber or golden hues. These golden types of rum usually present a more flavorful profile than the white or clear rums.

**Color:** Gold to caramel

**Tasting Notes:** Medium body with subtle flavors of vanilla, almond, citrus, caramel, or coconut.

**Suggested Cocktails:** Mojito or Pina Colada

### DARK RUM

Dark rums showcase the heaviest, fullest body of any rum classification. They've been well-aged in charred barrels and are darker and richer in both color and flavor profile.

**Color:** Light golden to amber

**Flavor notes:** Caramel and molasses

**Suggested Cocktail:** Mai Tai

### BLACK RUM

The term "black rum" is sometimes used interchangeably with "dark rum." Typically, though, black rum includes added molasses that darkens its color and sweetens the finished product.

**Color:** Black

**Tasting Notes:** Molasses, caramel, and spice

**Suggested Cocktail:** Dark 'N' Stormy

### SPICED RUM

Spiced rums have added spices to produce that signature style.

**Color:** Gold

**Tasting Notes:** Pepper, bay leaf, cinnamon, anise, ginger, vanilla, allspice, cassia, clove, and cardamon.

**Suggested Cocktails:** Rum Runner or Rum Punch

### NAVY RUM

A blend of dark, full-bodied, high-proof rums from Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados associated with the British Royal Navy.

**Color:** Black

**Tasting Notes:** Molasses, brown sugar, and spices. Slightly bitter.

**Suggested Cocktails:** Hurricane, Painkiller, or Zombie

### OVERPROOF

Overproof rum is bottled at 60 percent ABV or more.

**Color:** Golden to amber

**Tasting Notes:** Grassy, vanilla, banana, coconut, and molasses

**Suggested Cocktail:** Rum Punch

### RHUM AGRICOLE

Refers to rum which has been produced from sugarcane juice, as opposed to molasses.

**Color:** Light, gold, or dark

**Tasting Notes:** Earthy, powdered sugar, meringue, and sweet cream

**Suggested Cocktail:** Ti' Punch

### AGUARDIENTE

Aguardiente is a spirit fermented and distilled from fruit, most often sugar cane.

**Color:** Clear

**Tasting Notes:** Coconut, citrus and meringue and often have a spicy, earthy finish

**Suggested Cocktail:** Canelazo

# ur Rum

## By region:

### CACHAÇA

Made from fresh-pressed sugarcane juice, cachaça must be produced in Brazil.

**Color:** Clear

**Tasting Notes:** Nutty, spicy flavors and a tangy finish

**Suggested Cocktail:** Caipirinha

### DEMERARA RUM

Originated in Guyana, the sugar cane used to make this style of rum is grown in fields either side of Guyana's Demerara River—hence the name.

**Color:** Dark brown

**Tasting Notes:** Smoky, sweet, and molasses

**Suggested Cocktails:** Dark 'N' Stormy, Navy Grog, or Ancient Mariner

### JAMAICAN

Described as having a “funky” taste.

**Color:** Light to amber to very dark.

**Tasting Notes:** Nutty, gamey, overripe banana/fruit flavors.

**Suggested Cocktails:** Tiki drinks

### PUERTO RICAN

Not a very complex rum, it will build the alcohol base but not conflict with the other flavors in your favorite cocktail.

**Color:** Gold and clear

**Tasting Notes:** Light bodied

### BARBADOS

Many believe that the origins of rum stem from Barbados during the 17th century, driven by the successful development of the sugar industry on the island. Plantation slaves discovered that a by-product of the refining process, molasses, could be fermented into a raw liquor known locally as ‘rumbullion’ (or ‘kill-devil’!)

**Color:** Golden

**Tasting Notes:** Rich, silky, and plum

### CUBAN

Cuban rums make a good base for a layered drink. Light and especially pure, they're distilled from molasses laced with specially cultivated yeasts and filtered repeatedly through either sand or charcoal.

**Color:** Blanca (clear), oro (caramel), and añejo (dark)

**Tasting Notes:** Light, pure, and with a hint of charcoal.

### HAITI

A colony of France until 1793, Haiti has nevertheless kept to the French rum making methods—the agricole way—directly from fresh cane sugar juice, never from molasses, harvested locally and quickly fermented to ensure its grassy aromas.

**Color:** Clear

**Tasting Notes:** Nutty, spicy flavors and a tangy finish

*Information courtesy of the following sources:*

- [Masterclass](#)
- [Robs Rum Guide](#)
- [The Lost Tiki Lounge](#)
- [World Rum Guide](#)
- [Eater](#)
- [Tastings](#)



ONE OF JACLYN WATSON EVENTS' ENTRIES INTO LAST YEAR'S GALA AWARDS FEATURED A WATERMELON-BASED COCKTAIL DURING THE WEDDING'S COCKTAIL HOUR. PHOTO COURTESY RODEO & CO





### ALICE IN HULALAND

*Photo and recipe courtesy Carl Anderson, Sugar Beach Events*

An original cocktail named after a renowned shop on the north shore of Maui

#### INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$  oz Smith & Cross Jamaican Rum  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  oz Campari  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  oz fresh-squeezed lime juice  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  oz passion fruit simple syrup  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  oz simple syrup  
 Generous pinch of salt  
 2 oz Big Swell IPA (or other citrus-forward IPA)

#### METHOD

Combine ingredients 1 through 6 in a mixing tin with ice. Shake to combine and chill. Strain into coupe glass. Top with IPA.

## The History of Tiki Culture

**Created to provide a tropical escape from everyday life, tiki bars and the rum-filled cocktails served within have been part of American drinking culture for over 90 years. While the popularity of tiki bars has ebbed and flowed during that time, its appeal has left a lasting impact on the cocktail industry and American pop culture.**

The word tiki comes from Māori mythology, where it refers to the first man. The Māori and other Polynesian cultures carved images of their gods into wood and stone,

known as tiki statues. The term “tiki” was then used in American culture in the mid 20th century to describe style and decor from Polynesia and the South Pacific.

The first tiki bar in the United States was established in 1933 by the godfather of the tiki scene, Ernest Raymond Beaumont Gantt, better known as Donn Beach or Don The Beachcomber. Gantt spent his early years traveling the Caribbean with his grandfather and then the South Pacific, where he soaked up the various cultures, cuisine and drinks. He brought

those experiences back with him to California and some tropical decor he collected along the way and opened “Don’s Beachcomber Cafe” near Hollywood.

Don’s Beachcomber, which eventually changed its name to Don The Beachcomber, featured a mish-mash of the Caribbean and Polynesian culture with bamboo, bright colors, floral leis, rattan furniture and other nautical and tropical-themed decor.

The popularity of all things tiki began to wane in the late 1960s as

a younger generation types of leisure and entertainment. As their parents enjoyed tiki culture would never disappear from America. A renewed interest in tiki culture emerged in the late 1990s. A new generation of people discovered the appeal of tiki-style and iconography. They searched out vintage tiki mugs, clothing and other memorabilia. At the same time, modern tiki bars began creating new tiki drinks and collectibles. These modern devotees refer to classic tiki as Polynesian Pop.

## THE GREAT RETENDER

Photo and recipe courtesy Carl  
Anderson, Sugar Beach Events

### INGREDIENTS

1½ oz Pau Vodka  
¾ oz Cocchi Americano  
¾ oz fresh-squeezed lemon  
juice  
¾ oz simple syrup  
¾ oz pineapple juice  
4 ea. fresh pineapple chunks  
10 ea. fresh mint leaves

### METHOD

Muddle pineapple chunks  
with mint and pineapple juice  
in a mixing glass. Add the  
remaining ingredients and ice.  
Shake to combine. Pour into  
highball glass.

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The popularity of tiki bars  
and cocktails isn't without its  
controversy, however. Some  
believe that these types of bars and  
cocktails can not only be a form  
of cultural appropriation but can  
also reenforce stereotypes and the  
idea that Oceania is just a place  
to vacation, according to a [Los  
Angeles Times article](#). In fact, a new  
generation of beverage-industry  
professionals are shining a light on  
the genre's history of racial inequity  
and cultural appropriation through  
education and outreach, according  
to the article.

Or, as a [National Public Radio](#)  
interview with Kalewa Correa of the  
Smithsonian's Asian Pacific Islander  
Center put it back in 2016, "What  
you're looking at—the carvings  
[on drinking vessels] are either  
representations of gods, or they're  
representations of ancestors. So if  
we were to put that into a context  
that Americans would understand,  
it would be like going into a  
Christian-themed bar" with drinks  
served in glasses shaped like the  
Virgin Mary.

Information above courtesy [Keg Works](#)

## Sweet escape

Tropical drinks have gone through  
a bit of an evolution over the years,  
thanks in no small part to the  
evolving palates of consumers.

"For a long time, these cocktails  
were unbalanced and too sweet, but  
over the years, tropical drinks have  
transformed into more balanced  
beverages that highlight the rum  
rather than try to cover it up,"  
Anderson says. "Bartending has  
become more like being a baker  
where you carefully measure in  
fractions of an ounce to ensure  
precision instead of just eyeballing  
the ingredients and making it sweet  
rather than balanced.

"Instead of tropical/tiki cocktails  
being something you would  
haphazardly serve a cocktail  
neophyte because they are merely  
a sweet mix of fruit juice with a  
little rum, a Jet Pilot is treated with  
as much deference as a gin Martini  
and made with as much care for an  
audience that knows the difference."

The growing importance of  
sustainability is also having an  
impact on tropical drinks as more  
bartenders are utilizing "citrus  
stocks," rather than whole fruits, in  
order to cut down on fruit waste.

So, as winter continues to taunt  
us, indulge in one of these tropical  
drinks to help transport you to  
warmer locations.

"Before you even pour the first  
ounce of alcohol, tropical drinks  
offer escapism visually with their  
pineapple mugs, bouquets of mint,  
and flaming fruit," says Anderson,  
"then the flavors of unique  
ingredients such as orgeat, guava,  
and passionfruit propel you there in  
your mind after your first sip. They  
are cool, bright, and refreshing;  
which is exactly what a proper  
tropical, beachy drink should be."

Cheers! 



# *Up in the Air*

Part 2 of our Catering “On the Go” series  
looking at how to cater in unique environments  
that are constantly on the move

By Amber Kispert



**S** FOR MANY YEARS, airplane food has gotten a bit of a bad reputation: soggy pasta, rubbery eggs, and dried out chicken. Although these perceptions may have been unfair to the catering chefs, there was some truth to those descriptors. In the old days of airline catering, technology for re-heating and serving meals was still fairly rudimentary. However, today's in-flight meals are a far cry from those of yesteryear.

(TOP RIGHT) FLOUNDER WITH OYSTERS, A DELTA FIRST CLASS MEAL OFFERING, CREATED BY CHEF MASHAMA BAILEY. PHOTO COURTESY DELTA AIRLINES,  
(MIDDLE RIGHT) WHAT'S AN IN-FLIGHT MEAL WITHOUT DESSERT?.  
(BOTTOM RIGHT) CRISPY EGG KATSU SANDO.





# CATERING "ON THE GO"

## PART 2

"We've reached a tipping point where we expect organic, artisan, and local food at markets, grocery stores, and restaurants," said Chef Linton Hopkins, DeltaOne partner chef in a [promotional video for Delta Airlines](#). "Why shouldn't we have that on a plane?"

### TAKING FLIGHT

In-flight catering can be broken down into two different segments: commercial airlines and private planes. For commercial airlines, the majority partner with third-party catering companies (LSG Sky Chefs, Gate Gourmet, and Flying

Food Group are the three largest) to develop in-flight menus. In terms of private planes, clients will either contract with a third-party catering company, such as Aire Culinaire, or work with the caterer directly (Marcia Selden Catering & Events has an arm of their business called Medallion Club for clients with private planes).

"It's an arm of our business that we only market to the clients that we know have planes as a great benefit to them and a way to strengthen our relationships with them as they really appreciate that we do it," says Robin Selden, executive chef for Marcia Selden Catering & Events.



AN ASSORTMENT OF MEAL SELECTIONS CREATED BY CHEF MASHAMA BAILEY. PHOTO COURTESY DELTA AIRLINES





(ABOVE) GATE GOURMET PREPARES ITS IN-FLIGHT MEALS 24 HOURS BEFORE THEY ARE BLAST CHILLED FOR IN-FLIGHT TRANSPORT.

Catering for private planes is the same as catering for an off-premise venue except that your venue will be moving.

“The plane is taking off at a certain time and you better have everything on it, ready to go because once it leaves your job is done,” says Selden.

Commercial airline catering, however, is a completely different beast altogether because of the high volume, transportation, and reheating that goes along with it. Traditionally, meals are served to first-class passengers on domestic flights, and to all passengers on international flights (though with some variations between menus). The pilot and the in-flight crew will also usually receive a meal.

“Airline catering kitchens are factories,” said Kyle Schafer, Research Director for Airports Unite

Here, in an [interview with CNBC](#). “There’s workers preparing that food, there’s workers plating that food, and there’s workers loading everything up into the plane.”

## FROM THE KITCHEN TO THE SKY

The very first step when it comes to in-flight catering for commercial airlines is to hear from the client, much like a traditional catering operation: who the customer is (which airline), what is the route (the starting location and the destination), what is their brand identity, and what types of menus are they looking for?

“We design a menu for what they’re looking for and the route that they



(ABOVE) GATE GOURMET'S HIGHLOADER TRUCKS DELIVER THE IN-FLIGHT MEALS TO THE AIRPLANES.

are going to fly,” says Chef Sylvain Harribey, one of the Executive Chefs for Gate Gourmet (which works closely with Delta Airlines). “Each airline has their own vision of what they want, and what they’re looking for.”

Once they know the order, the catering teams will get to work developing menus.

“It takes quite some time for us to do that because we have to look for





recipes that will be able to fly well,” Harribey says.

Beyond their executive catering chefs, Gate Gourmet also works with a team of Innovation chefs who help develop new recipes to alleviate some of the pressure off the catering team.

“Chefs were getting bogged down with the operations and it became very difficult to manage an operation and be creative,” says Molly Brandt, an Innovation Chef for Gate Gourmet. “If you think of it in terms of fashion, I’m designing the couture line and then I hand these recipes over to our design chefs who make it fast fashion—they’re the ones who make in-flight dining possible, they have all the experience with the operations.

“What I produce may not necessarily be what they can produce, but the idea is there, and it helps them with



(ABOVE) SWEET & SOUR SHORT RIB.

their creative process. It’s up to the design chef to decide how much of that recipe they’re going to use.”

## TAKING IT TO THE TRAY TABLE

When developing menus, there are unique considerations for chefs, specifically what will travel and reheat well. There’s a common misperception that in-flight meals are frozen, but 95 percent of meals are made fresh daily, according to a [video from Eater](#).

“We just don’t want to come up with some great new fancy ideas,” said Chef Gerry Gulli, Executive Chef with United Airlines in the CNBC interview. “We just want to make sure that the outcome is going to be executed the way we want it day in and day out.”

“It’s that reheating piece that gets a little tricky with certain foods,” said Chef Christian Hallowell with Gate Gourmet in the Eater video. “You’re probably never going to have a good French fry on an airplane.”

When weighing ingredients for in-flight menus, fruits and vegetables with more water content (such as tomatoes and cucumbers) will travel much better than greens with less water content.

“When you’re flying and you get a green salad, the air in the cabin is so dry that it sucks the life out of it,” Brandt says. “Tomatoes or cucumbers are so much more satisfying to eat than a dry piece of lettuce.”

For proteins, the tried-and-true superstars are seabass, meatballs, and other fatty meats. Red meats can be done in-flight, but it becomes more difficult.

“It’s delicious when it’s medium rare and you’ve just taken it off the grill,” says Brandt. “When it’s reheated, not so delicious.”

Wet-based cooking methods (braising, stewing, etc.) typically work the best for proteins for in-flight meals, according to Brandt, and appetizers most always need to be cold.

There is also a lot of taste testing that



(LEFT) MANY OF SINGAPORE AIRLINES IN-FLIGHT MENUS WERE DESIGNED TO PROVIDE FRESH AND HEALTHY DINING OPTIONS AND REDUCE INDIGESTION AND INSULIN SPIKES, CURB WATER RETENTION, AND MAKE TRAVELERS FEEL FULLER LONGER. PHOTO COURTESY SINGAPORE AIRLINES

goes into the menu development for in-flight catering because as altitude increases, the humidity decreases which leads to passengers losing about 30 percent of their taste buds, says Brandt, so food ends up not tasting as pronounced as it should.

“You want to push the salinity in some of these things,” she says. “You need to balance flavor profiles all across the board.”

Bolder, more vibrant mixes of herbs and spices are utilized to bring out the flavors and compensate for the altitude as well as dryness in the cabin.

For taste testing, the chefs and representatives from the customer will reheat the items to mimic how they will be reheated in-flight, and they’ll also plug their noses which

can oftentimes mimic the loss of taste buds in-flight.

“It’s quite intense,” says Harribey. “There are so many dishes to prepare, to taste, and then we must adjust them based on the customer request. There’s quite a bit of time between development and when it’s going to fly.”

Meals are typically prepared the day prior to being delivered to the aircraft by a large team of chefs, the number of which is dependent on the size of the airline and/or aircraft and how many kitchens they have. Chefs are split between various stations, such as grilling and searing, sauces, starches, and vegetables. Plates are meticulously weighed by the kitchen staff before being plated into the to-go containers.

“We go through the whole entire menu, dish by dish, ingredient by ingredient,” Harribey says.

“Everything has to be the same for all customers because we get paid by the weight, and when you’re talking about a huge plane, you’re talking about a lot of food and a lot of weight here—everything counts, everything matters.”

Once the meals are packaged, they are then blast chilled and packed in dry ice before being delivered and loaded onto the plane.

“Once it’s on the plane, we’re not getting it back,” says Harribey.

The final flourish for an in-flight meal lands on the shoulders of the flight attendants who must reheat everything to the chef’s

## By the Numbers

Here’s a look at in-flight catering by the numbers, according to CNBC and Emirates Flight Catering, which is an in-flight catering service based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates that provides catering and support services for Emirates Airlines and all other airlines based at Dubai International Airport.

- In 2018, **2.8 million people** flew in and out of airports every day
- Emirates Flight Catering in Dubai makes an average of **225,000 meals a day** for over **500 flights**
- Culinary team of **11,000 people**
- **1,800 chefs**
- **\$1 billion** a year spent on food
- **7,000 menus** a year
- **110 million** meals served
- **1,400 tons** of potatoes
- **72 million** bread rolls
- **61 tons** of strawberries
- **188 tons** of salmon
- In-flight catering is a **\$6 billion business** in the United States, according to IBISWorld
- In-flight catering is expected to be a **\$9.5 billion business by the end of 2026**, according to fact.MR







instructions, before referring to the photos that were provided to achieve the proper plating.

“All of those things make a big difference,” says Brandt. “There’s a lot of method in all of this—the end result is very precise.”

Unfortunately, not everything always makes it to the tray table as food will need to be discarded as the result of flight delays and cancellations.

“Yes, it’s challenging, but if we can do that, it’ll be part of an incredible experience that customers will remember,” said Jaime Jewell, General Manager for Brand Strategy Experience for Delta Airlines in the promotional video.

“When you’re not in this business, you don’t realize what we need to go through to make it happen,” says Harribey.

## FLYING DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

Airlines have continued to make enhancements to its onboard meals. For example, Delta Airlines has partnered with Hopkins as well as chefs Michelle Bernstein and Danny Meyer, New York City restaurateur and CEO of the Union Square Hospitality Group to showcase ingredients sourced at the height of flavor, from artisan, local small-batch producers.

Seasonality has also become a hot trend among in-flight catering to ensure meals feature fresh-picked

# New Standard for in-flight Beverage Catering saves Tons of CO<sub>2</sub>

**C**omprehensive study recommends Skytender Solutions’ technology for mass deployment

Skytender is the world’s first solution that enables airlines to completely reorganize their beverage catering through beverage vending machines built as trolleys and fully approved by the various aviation authorities. Plastic bottles and soft drink cans can be completely eliminated from catering and cabin logistics. This could save the aviation industry 64 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year—a 70 percent reduction compared to the current system.

Over two tons of carbon dioxide emissions can be saved per beverage served onboard an aircraft, according to a recent study conducted by the UNESCO Chair in Life Cycle and Climate Change (ESCI-UPF) to assess Skytender Solutions’ technology. Additionally, Skytender can help alleviate plastic waste as well. According to the International Air

Transport Association (IATA), 12.2 million metric tons of waste are produced in aircraft cabins each year, 60 percent of which is plastic waste; Skytender can help decrease the amount of waste as well.

“The current system with cans, bottles, and juice bags is completely outdated, not only technologically but also economically. Derived from the research project conducted by the UNESCO Chair in Life Cycle and Climate Change (ESCI-UPF), our system saves up to 95 percent plastic waste, and even more valuable: CO<sub>2</sub> emissions drop by an average of 70 percent due to other supply chains, easier transport, and many other adjusting screws. What’s more, airlines save enormous amounts of money thanks to our technology platform,” says Dr. Thomas Mützel-von Schwartz, Skytender’s Chief Technical Officer.

Information courtesy  
[Euromarcom Public Relations](#)



AN EXAMPLE OF ONE OF SINGAPORE AIRLINE'S IN-FLIGHT MEAL CHOICES.  
PHOTO COURTESY SINGAPORE AIRLINES



HAZELNUT  
HUCKLEBERRY  
CAKE.



SMOKED  
CHICKEN  
BREAST.



MANY AIRLINES ARE STARTING TO  
PARTNER WITH LOCAL FARMS AND  
PRODUCERS TO BRING MORE FRESH,  
REGIONAL INGREDIENTS TO THEIR  
IN-FLIGHT DINING MENUS.

All photos courtesy Gate Gourmet unless otherwise noted.

vegetables at the peak of flavor—bringing the farm to the tray table. Regional and international dishes have also become increasingly popular for in-flight meals as a way to not only accommodate passengers from all over the world, but to also bring a little bit of the destination on board. For example, Delta has partnered with its sales teams in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Latin America, and the Asia Pacific, to incorporate food and beverages that resonate with the airline's global customers by offering regional

entrees from various regions, including Spain, Italy, and Germany for its European customers. In Latin America, customers can enjoy local fare such as Alfajores from Argentina, Inca Cola from Peru, and Guarana from Brazil. "We're paying homage to that specific cuisine," says Brandt. "You don't want to end up with something inauthentic or poor fusion." Brandt says she's always keeping a close eye on the culinary trends (vegetarian, fermented foods, etc.) of today and how to successfully

translate them into in-flight dining. "I've worked in all areas of catering, so this is the last frontier for me," she says. "The food that I made a year ago to now has seriously evolved because you start understanding that things are more successful than others—the more you fly the more you understand. "You start paying attention when you're in the air because that's where the rubber hits the road." **CS**





# State of the Industry – Employee Engagement

I recently asked a room of over 300 event professionals to raise their hand if they were experiencing a record year in terms of sales. Ninety percent of the hands went up. I then asked how many of them were trying to hire more people, and again almost everyone in the room shot their hands up into the air. To set the stage for the state of employee engagement in the hospitality industry we must acknowledge the current landscape. The culture in companies across the country is being tested. Tested by an abundance of business knocking on the door. Tested with an extremely tight job market; and tested by the stress, devastation, and exhaustion from the pandemic and the ensuing recovery.

Our industry has been on a wild roller coaster ride filled with steep drops, wild turns, and drastic speed changes and there's been no time to catch our collective breath. Here is what I'm seeing in terms of employee engagement and suggestions on what to do about it.

## **The job market is still tight, but help may be on the way**

Recent employment numbers continue to confirm that there are almost twice as many jobs available as there are people looking for work. Of the almost 11 million jobs available across the country, more than 15% are estimated to be hospitality related. This has put a major strain on current teams who are short-staffed and can't keep up with demand. When there is a shortage of workers, desperation hiring becomes an even bigger problem.

Among 400 catering employees we surveyed, more than half felt like their company did not have an in-depth hiring process that weeded out bad apples. Leaders must be mindful of the impact high turnover is having on their employees. The added stress, anxiety, and workload is causing a decline in engagement; however, this can be overcome with a thorough hiring process and limiting the number of times you are sending teams out understaffed. There is also hope on the horizon for the job market. Inflation and rising costs are forcing people back into the workforce and there has been a recent uptick in people looking to pick up second jobs.

## Protecting the work environment

There has been an increase in bad behavior coming from guests at events. Pent up demand for in-person gatherings and rising costs have left a lot of people with a sense of entitlement that is causing significant stress and uncomfortable working conditions for caterers and event professionals. Caterers are reporting an increase in the number of instances that have required intervention from managers. Teams are having to contend with verbal abuse, threats, rudeness, and overly intoxicated guests. It's important that companies take precautions to guard against these situations, but also protect their teams in the event it does occur. I've spoken with caterers who have asked to be removed from venue lists due to the type of events they attract. Caterers are adding clauses into their contracts to make clients acutely aware that this behavior will not be tolerated. I've talked with multiple event professionals who have had to shut down bars early because guests were sneaking in their own alcohol or trying to serve themselves from behind the bar. A hostile work environment is not OK and is a quick way to crush employee engagement. We can't control

how people act, but we can control how we respond. When employees see leaders taking steps to protect them in these situations, engagement reverses course and skyrockets.

## Wages must be fair, but it's not everything

Most caterers have raised wages in 2022 and some have even done it twice. It's important to keep pay consistent with market rates and make sure team members feel that they are being compensated fairly. With that being said, compensation is still not at the top of what drives employee engagement. Employee engagement continues to be driven by other factors like a clear growth track, flexible scheduling, and a feeling of belonging. These are factors that can fall by the wayside when business demand is booming. Resist the urge to try and solve engagement issues with money. Investing time in people and their development within your organization can pay much larger dividends. It also pays to focus on activities, events, and meetings that put an emphasis on bringing the team closer together. When team members feel connected to their co-workers their engagement with the company increases.

## Building in finish lines

Most people crave certainty and understanding—especially in

situations where there is instability. Our collective industry has not had a break for the past three years. The pendulum of business swung back and forth from zero to one hundred, putting companies in desperation mode on both sides. When there is no clear end in sight, it's exhausting and can leave people feeling deflated, causing a drop in engagement. Leaders can counter this by creating starting and end points throughout the year for their teams. Implementing a challenge for the month can keep people engaged and energized. And when done well, it can focus efforts toward an area of need. It could be a prize for the most accurate events (no forgotten items) or a contest for who can get the most five-star reviews. Many caterers are managing their calendars to give their teams something to look forward to by closing and not taking any business for a weekend or even a full week at the end of a busy stretch to give everyone a chance to reset.

Employee engagement is more critical than ever before. With a tight job market and tremendous opportunity to capitalize on demand for events, catering companies can't afford to spend unnecessary time dealing with turnover and unproductive behavior. Heading into 2023 the companies that make this a priority will gain efficiencies that will put them ahead of their competition and provide a ride that is much smoother and enjoyable. 



**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](#).



# 'Tis the Season... for 2023 Budgeting: Four Key Areas for Financial Success



“Designing a fluid, shareable budget for which all stakeholders are accountable and that accounts for every business area is critical.”

**Ah, budgeting season.** While chefs may have visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads this time of year, the owners and general managers may have dollar signs dancing in their heads instead. After speaking with many International Caterers Association members over the past few months, we've learned that this budgeting season, it's not all champagne and caviar. The impact of COVID, ever-rising inflation, and a looming recession means budgeting season is more important than ever for profitability and longevity.

The good news, though?

Our most recent ICA Operations Roundtable webinar, hosted by Taylored Hospitality (Frank Christian) and SB Value, covered everything catering business leaders need to know to prepare successfully. Today, we're sharing key takeaways with actionable tips, so you can design a budget that works for your business in the new year.

## Understanding what is going to impact your 2023 catering budget

The world still hasn't quite recovered from the ups and downs of the pandemic, unfortunately. And

this is noticeable with all the factors impacting catering businesses in the new year. During budgeting season and throughout the year, you're going to want to keep your eye on the following:

### Employment

While unemployment is down, hospitality roles remain the most difficult to fill. You must be ready to offer higher salaries and incentives to secure talent.

### Inflation

Inflation will still be around 8%, and it's not just food costs increasing. Health plans could increase up to 25%, gas and diesel will be up 5–10% year-over-year, and electricity will rise 10% or more, no matter where you're located. The list goes on. With this, it's important to take a look at your line items and take year-over-year inflation into consideration when setting your budgeted spend.

### Consumer spending

The impending recession and inflation have consumer spending wavering. Be sensible with projections and take that into consideration for both social and corporate events.

## Creating your budget based upon sales forecasts

So, while you don't have control over global affairs and the impact they have on your business, you do have full control over your forecasting. So, that's where your budgeting should begin.

Here's a simple equation you can deploy to start the foundation of your budget to ensure a healthy net profit:

- **Sales Projections - Minus Direct Costs (40–50%) = Gross Profit (60–50%)**
- **Gross Profit - Minus Expenses (40–50%) = Net Profit (5–15%)**

Let's break this down a little bit further.

**Direct costs** can be considered anything related to your events. So, think items like offsite and direct labor, uniforms and laundry, rentals, van and delivery costs, food and beverage costs, event supplies, etc.

Other areas that will depend on your location are payroll taxes and worker's comp for hourly employees.

**Pro Tip:** Every time the kitchen or warehouse opens, pennies fly out the window, so gamify these expense categories for your team and provide perks for savings. It's a great and fun way to keep those costs down!

Next, **expenses** are considered your overhead administrative expenses that aren't directly event-related, like rent, salaries, and sales and marketing spend. The best way to think about this is all the expenses you're carrying, whether you have events on the books or not, which is important to remember.

Not included in the above, as there aren't industry standards due to high variability business to business, are line items like legal fees, equipment

maintenance, human resources and training, etc.

Designing a fluid, shareable budget for which all stakeholders are accountable and that accounts for every business area is critical. Involve your management team in this projection process. Don't go it alone! Then, finalize. But that's not where it ends.

## Watching critical numbers for ultimate profitability

But the true key to budgeting is not to set it and forget it.

A budget is meant to be a working document that pivots with the needs of the business. So, the next key is to set reminders to monitor weekly, monthly, and with each payroll cycle so you can analyze where spending is on point and where it needs to be adjusted.

### Weekly review

- Sales closing & pacing
- Post-event analysis including (but not limited to):
  - Delivery/setup costs vs. delivery/setup revenue
  - Admin fee vs. commissions
  - Staff cost & service charge vs. staff revenue & service charge revenue

- Warehouse labor

### Monthly review

- Food & beverage costs to revenue
- Kitchen & warehouse labor
- Warehouse/operations cost to total revenue
- In-house costs (food, beverage, staff) to total revenue

### Payroll cycle review

- Revenue to payroll
- Event labor revenue to costs

- Admin/overhead labor cost to revenue

- Kitchen & warehouse labor

By doing this, you're able to determine if you're pacing properly toward your goals, if you need to cut back on labor, or increase minimums to cover food cost. Without doing this, you're likely leaving money on the table.

## Budgeting is the first step toward transforming your profitability

Of ICA members surveyed, only 58% of respondents created a budget for 2022. Yes, budgeting takes work and time. But it's the key to your inevitable success if you invest those resources! If you can stay informed on the market, base your numbers on accurate projections, share the vision, and analyze often, your budget will be the start of transforming your profitability in the new year.

### Sources:

- <https://www.kiplinger.com/economic-forecasts>
- <https://www.kiplinger.com/economic-forecasts/interest-rates>

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](http://internationalcaterers.org).



# TO TREND OR NOT TO TREND

**2023 FOOD TRENDS** FOCUS ON FRESH INGREDIENTS AND INNOVATION

BY AMBER KISPERT



(ABOVE)  
PUMPKIN SOUP  
WITH SAGE.

**It's once again time to take a look at what trends will be on the menu for 2023.**

**Next year will usher in new flavors, a focus on fresh ingredients, innovation, and dare we say it, a lot of fun.**

## **A happy & healthy world**

Though not necessarily a new trend, 2023 will continue to put a strong emphasis on sustainability through clean label products and upcycling.

### ***Clean label***

Plant-based eating has been in vogue, and now clean eating is on the rise, calling for fewer, simpler ingredients.

**According to the Food Institute,** one in 10 consumer conversations on plant-based or vegan food are about clean eating, with significant references to natural foods that are healthy, sustainable, and free of artificial ingredients.

In response, a number of companies and product developers are spearheading a new breed of plant-based foods that highlight the use of minimally processed and recognizable ingredients. The number of ingredient companies that make clean labels building blocks to improve texture, flavor, and appearance for plant-based brands is also predicted to increase in the years ahead.



DURING THE INTERNATIONAL FOODSERVICE EDITORIAL COUNCIL'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE (HELD LAST MONTH IN SANTA BARBARA), UPCYCLED FOOD INC TEAMED UP WITH CHEF SHERRY YARD (CAKE WARS: CHRISTMAS) TO CREATE AN ORIGINAL COOKIE RECIPE USING ITS REGRAINED SUPERGRAIN+®, WHICH IS A NUTRIENT-DENSE FLOUR MADE FROM SPENT BREWER'S GRAIN. PHOTO COURTESY BUZZ ORR MULTIMEDIA

## It's time to upcycle

According to Upcycled Foods Inc., every year roughly a third of all food is wasted. That equates to about 1,000 pounds per person. To combat this, more companies and chefs are finding innovative ways to reuse, or "upcycle," foods that may otherwise go unused or be thrown away.

A few examples of different ways to upcycle include:

- **Repurposing pulp:** Nondairy milk alternatives like oat milk and almond milk have become commonplace on shelves and in coffee shops but making them leads to a byproduct that's often wasted—at least until now. Brands are beginning to upcycle these byproducts to create new innovations in the baking space, from alternative flours to baking mixes.
- **No whey:** Leftover whey from cheese can be repurposed into dressings, used for fermentation, added to yogurt smoothies and shakes, and used as cooking liquid for potatoes, rice, grits, pasta, and grains.
- **Cheers to beer:** Rescued brewer's "spent" grain (BSG) from beer can be upcycled in place of traditional flours and grains.
- **More meat:** Off-cuts of steak can be repurposed into meatballs.

"This is having a moment right now," said Dan Kurzrock, founder & CEO, of Upcycled Foods Inc. during the annual International Foodservice Editorial Council (IFEC) conference in Santa Barbara in November 2022. "You don't need to make it a huge chasm for people to cross."

## New diets to watch

Two new eating styles are gaining traction among consumers: regenetarian and climatarian.

- **A regenetarian** is someone who strives to eat in a way that regenerates the planet and humanity. By only consuming food that is produced using regenerative food production practices (diverse crop varieties, rotational grazing, agroforestry, etc.), consumers can contribute to the regeneration of natural systems.
- **A climatarian** swaps from beef and lamb to pork and poultry to reduce carbon emissions.

(BELOW) REGENERATIVE REFERS TO FARMING, RANCHING AND PASTORAL PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO STABILIZING THE PLANET'S CLIMATE AND CARBON CYCLES BY REHABILITATING ORGANIC MATTER IN SOIL, THEREBY INCREASING CARBON STORAGE, RETAINING MOISTURE, AND SAFEGUARDING BIODIVERSITY AND LIVING SYSTEMS.





# TO TREND OR NOT TO TREND



CHARCUTERIE BOARDS HAVE HAD THEIR MOMENT (AND THEY CONTINUE TO), BUT NOW IT'S TIME TO MAKE WAY FOR THE BREAD BOARD. A BREAD BOARD IS ESSENTIALLY THAT: DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARTISANAL BREADS SERVED WITH A VARIETY OF BUTTERS, OILS, VINEGARS AND CHEESES, MANY OF WHICH CAN BE LOCALIZED. PHOTO COURTESY FOOTERS CATERING

## Bread is back

Charcuterie boards have had their moment (and they continue to), but now it's time to make way for the bread board.

"People are loving bread again," said Chef Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) during a Chef Roundtable webinar earlier this year with the International Caterers Association.

A bread board is essentially that: different types of artisanal breads served with a variety of butters, oils, vinegars, and cheeses, many of which can be local. For example, Cartewheels Catering's Rustic Breads and Spreads board celebrates its Texas roots with pimento cheese spreads and honey butters.

"People go wild," said Emily Simpson during the Chef Roundtable. "It's just bread, but people are ready for the bread."

Whether it's a station, bread baskets in the center of the table, or individual plates, bread is back in a big way.



NEW WAVE SHRIMP® IS A PLANT-BASED SEAFOOD ALTERNATIVE MADE WITH MUNG BEAN AND SEAWEED. DURING 2022 INTERNATIONAL FOODSERVICE EDITORIAL COUNCIL'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE IT WAS FEATURED AS PART OF A TIJUANA SHRIMP BITE WHICH FEATURED TORTILLAS, AN AVOCADO & CITRUS SALAD (AVOCADOS, KIWIS, ORANGES, LIMES, GRAPEFRUIT, FENNEL, RED ONION, AND MINT), AND A ROASTED TOMATO SALSA (TOMATOES, RED ONION, CARROTS, GARLIC, SERRANO CHILES, AND CILANTRO). PHOTO COURTESY BUZZ ORR MULTIMEDIA

## Emergen-sea

The next wave of plant-based meat alternatives is seafood.

Global fish consumption has doubled since 1998 and is projected to nearly double again by 2050; however, 70% of marine fish populations have been fully used, overused, or are under severe threat because of rising ocean temperatures, overfishing, and unsustainable fishing practices, and pollution, according to the Food Institute.

The continued popularity of seafood, and a keener focus on sustainability, has given rise to seafood alternatives. Common ingredients in alternative seafood products are mung beans, seaweed, soybeans, fava beans, peas, and green lentils. Additionally, banana blossom is gaining popularity because of its flaky texture.





(LEFT) THIS DYNAMIC VEGETARIAN DISH IS INSPIRED BY A CLASSIC SICHUAN NOODLE DISH CALLED MAYISHANGSHU, WHICH UTILIZES THICKLY CUT ZOODLES (ZUCCHINI CUT AS NOODLES) THAT ARE CHARRED IN A VERY HOT WOK ALONG WITH CARROTS AND MUNG BEAN SPROUTS AND TOSSED WITH A SPICY MUSHROOM SAUCE. RECIPE COURTESY TOM BERRY (CHIEF CULINARY OFFICER FOR COJE MANAGEMENT GROUP. PHOTO COURTESY RUKA RESTOBAR

## Ve-ghetti

It's getting even easier to sneak in a serving of produce every day with the growing popularity of plant-based pasta. While chickpeas, cauliflower, and zucchini alternatives are nothing new, different produce is finding its way into pastas. Think noodles made from spaghetti squash, hearts of palm, and green bananas.



(ABOVE) CHICKPEA ROTINI IN A CREAMY PESTO WITH CHICKEN. PHOTO COURTESY BARILLA

(LEFT) IDAHO POTATO "LASAGNA" SHEETS CAN BE MADE WITH THINLY SLICED POTATOES SEASONED WITH OLIVE OIL, SALT, AND PEPPER. SHOWN: CHILLED SUMMER IDAHO® POTATO "LASAGNA" WITH CHAMPAGNE VINEGAR AND LAYERED WITH OTHER IN-SEASON ROASTED VEGETABLES. PHOTO COURTESY IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

## Bottoms up

Bottoms up, upside down, or however you refer to desserts whose finishing flourish requires it to be flipped over atop a plate, there's no denying their delicious appeal to your customers, according to [General Mills Foodservice](#). The names may sound fancy, but they are easy to execute with maximum "wow" factor. Add them to your breakfast, lunch, dinner, or dessert menus for all-day enjoyment!

(RIGHT) GENERAL MILLS FOODSERVICE'S BANANA FOSTER UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE FEATURES PILLSBURY™ TUBESSET MUFFIN BATTER, BROWN SUGAR, BANANAS, AND BUTTER. PHOTO COURTESY GENERAL MILLS FOODSERVICE





# TO TREND OR NOT TO TREND



IN 2021, THE INTERNATIONAL FOODSERVICE EDITORIAL COUNCIL FEATURED A "CRAB CAKE" MADE FROM LION'S MANE MUSHROOMS. PHOTO COURTESY BUZZ ORR MULTIMEDIA

## Mush ado about nothing

Unique and specialty mushrooms are having a moment.

"Mushrooms are trending because they hold a unique and solid position at the intersection of flavor and wellness," says Pam Smith, a consultant for the National Mushroom Council. "They are the ultimate flavor lifter to any dish, prized by culinarians for their crave-able umami flavor, distinctive textures and culinary versatility."

Today, such varieties as lion's mane, maitake, shiitake, trumpet, and blue oyster are sought after for their incredible health and healing properties, according to Chantal Hause (Fabulous Food). In addition to serving mushrooms as a main or a side dish, mushroom cocktails are a hot new thing this fall and winter.

"From the thick, meaty stems of king trumpets and the cabbage-like craggy appearance of maitakes to the blue-hued oyster, satiating mushrooms deliver a memorable eating experience," says Smith. "Always in season, mushrooms provide chefs with a broad canvas for menu exploration."



(ABOVE) MOST PEOPLE EQUATE THE TASTE OF LION'S MANE TO THAT OF LOBSTER OR CRAB MEAT, WITH EARTHIER OVERTONES. LION'S MANE IS TENDER AND JUICY WHEN COOKED, AND IT'S OFTEN USED AS A SEAFOOD REPLACEMENT (SUCH AS CRAB CAKES) IN VEGAN RECIPES. PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL MUSHROOM COUNCIL

(LEFT) THE TEXTURE OF A TRUMPET MUSHROOM IS SOMETIMES LIKENED TO ABALONE OR SCALLOPS, WHICH MAKES THEM AN INTERESTING OPTION FOR VEGETARIANS AND ARE OFTEN BILLED AS 'MUSHROOM STEAKS' OR 'VEGAN SCALLOPS.' SHOWN: TRUMPET MUSHROOM SCALLOPS WITH BROWN BUTTER AND THYME. PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL MUSHROOM COUNCIL





(ABOVE) THE BATATA FEATURES REPOSADO TEQUILA, MEZCAL, CHARRED LIME JALAPEÑO & PEPPERCORN BITTERS, AND SWEET POTATO SYRUP (BROWN SUGAR, PURÉED ROASTED COVINGTON SWEET POTATO, WATER, CHILI FLAKE, AND CAYENNE PEPPER) RECIPE COURTESY BUD TAYLOR OF THE BISTRO AT TOPSAIL. PHOTO COURTESY NC SWEETPOTATO COMMISSION

## Mucho mezcal

Mezcal lovers have some creative concoctions to look forward to, according to Hause. Mezcal cocktails are popping up everywhere and are the next hot sip.

Although mezcal has been steadily growing in popularity in the last five years, the smoky spirit is making a major play on menus as the replacement in some classic cocktails, such as a Negroni Oaxacan style, hot toddy, or an old fashioned.



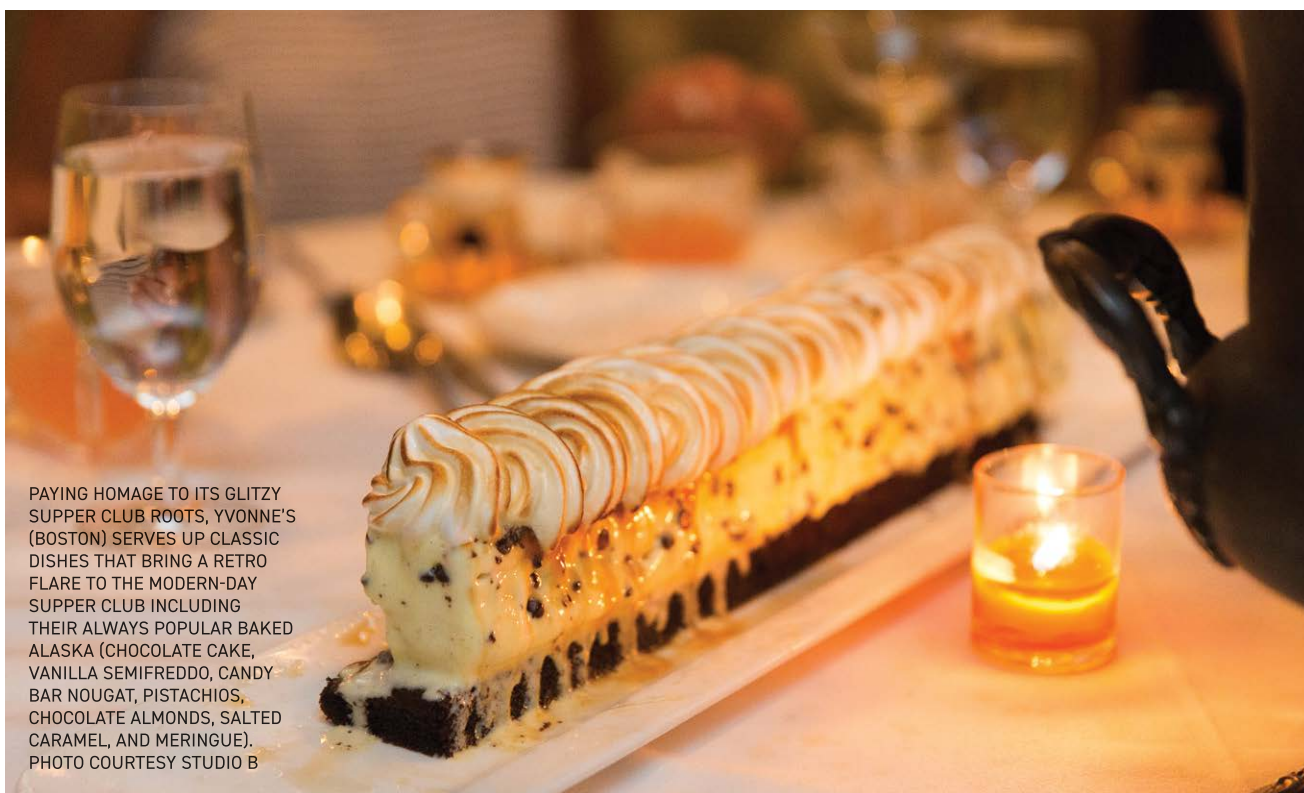
(ABOVE) YVONNE'S (BOSTON) SERVES A HEARTBREAKER COCKTAIL THAT FEATURES SPICY TEQUILA, MEZCAL, POMEGRANATE, ORGEAT, LIME, AND ANGOSTURA SERVED IN A LARGE FORMAT SHAREABLE STYLE. PHOTO COURTESY JOSH JAMISON



THE MANGO MUCHACHO MARGARITA IS A DELICIOUS MIX OF MUDDLED MANGO, POBLANO PEPPER, AGAVE, FRESH LIME JUICE, TEQUILA, AND MEZCAL FOR A HINT OF SMOKINESS. THE DRINK IS STRAINED INTO A ICED GLASS AND GARNISHED WITH A SLICED MANGO FAN, LIME WHEEL, AND A SLICE OF CHARRED POBLANO PEPPER FOR A SPICY KICK. PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL MANGO BOARD



# TO TREND OR NOT TO TREND



PAYING HOMAGE TO ITS GLITZY SUPPER CLUB ROOTS, YVONNE'S (BOSTON) SERVES UP CLASSIC DISHES THAT BRING A RETRO FLARE TO THE MODERN-DAY SUPPER CLUB INCLUDING THEIR ALWAYS POPULAR BAKED ALASKA (CHOCOLATE CAKE, VANILLA SEMIFREDDO, CANDY BAR NOUGAT, PISTACHIOS, CHOCOLATE ALMONDS, SALTED CARAMEL, AND MERINGUE). PHOTO COURTESY STUDIO B

## Retro throwbacks

All the flavors you know and love from childhood are back—but with a healthy or adult twist. Whether you're following a special diet or just looking to eat healthier, 2023 will see a wave of nostalgia hit menus. Think mac and cheese, but vegan-friendly, or vegetarian options of beef wellington (beet wellington and squash wellington), and unique twists on classic cereals.

"It's comfort food that has been modernized," said Charlie Schaffer (Schaffer LA) during the ICA Chef Roundtable.



CINNAMON TOAST CRUNCH™ IN A CREAMY, ICE CREAM FORM. PHOTO COURTESY GENERAL MILLS FOODSERVICE



NOTHING SAYS NOSTALGIA QUITE LIKE A WHOOPIE PIE. THE RETRO FAVORITE CAN BE ELEVATED WITH UNIQUE INGREDIENTS, LIKE THIS S'MORES VERSION FROM HERSHEY FOODSERVICE. PHOTO COURTESY HERSHEY FOODSERVICE



(RIGHT) THIS LAMB POT PIE ELEVATES THE CLASSIC DISH WITH A LUSCIOUS ROOT VEGETABLE BASE MATCHED WITH BRAISED CHUNKS OF AMERICAN LAMB SHOULDER TOPPED WITH A SHREDDED FILO DOUGH LID. PHOTO COURTESY AMERICAN LAMB BOARD

(BELOW) AN OLD FASHIONED CHOCOLATE SODA MADE WITH CHOCOLATE SYRUP, HEAVY CREAM, CRUSHED ICE, CLUB SODA, WHIPPED CREAM, AND TOPPED WITH A CHERRY. PHOTO COURTESY HERSHEY FOODSERVICE



THESE INDIVIDUAL BEEF WELLINGTONS ARE TOPPED WITH MUSHROOMS, WRAPPED IN PROSCIUTTO BEFORE BEING BAKED IN A PASTRY AND SERVED WITH A COGNAC CREAM SAUCE. PHOTO COURTESY GENERAL MILLS FOODSERVICE





## Flavors to Watch

McCormick for Chefs' most recent [Flavor Forecast](#) showcases the nuance, complexity, and passion that goes into a perfect bite:

### *Full Flavored Fats*

No longer misunderstood, consumers and chefs alike are now using fat, from butters to oils, to impart mouthwatering flavor and creaminess into everyday dishes and drinks, which offer a simple, comforting richness to the kitchen and a more balanced approach to eating.

### *Everyday French*

Grounded in the techniques and ingredients of French cooking, but democratized for today's kitchen, French cuisine has never been more approachable while using the best ingredients and culinary techniques to build a harmony of flavors and lay the foundations for food and beverage to come.

### *Beyond Heat*

We've witnessed an exciting evolution to this new, multi-sensorial, layered taste experience that pushes beyond the singularly spicy realm where heat and ingredient pairings come together to shape how heat is perceived and how long it lingers and finishes.

### *Flavor of the Year*

Along with the trends report, the McCormick global culinary team also announced its inaugural Flavor of the Year: Vietnamese x Cajun Style Seasoning, which is a bright, complex reflection of the innovations in food and flavor taking place on a global level. With influences in French cuisine and a prominence of heat throughout both, the seasoning is a culture clash of key ingredients—cayenne and paprika—in classic Cajun tradition and the lemongrass, garlic, and black peppercorn, customary in Vietnamese recipes.

# TO TREND OR NOT TO TREND

## Save the date

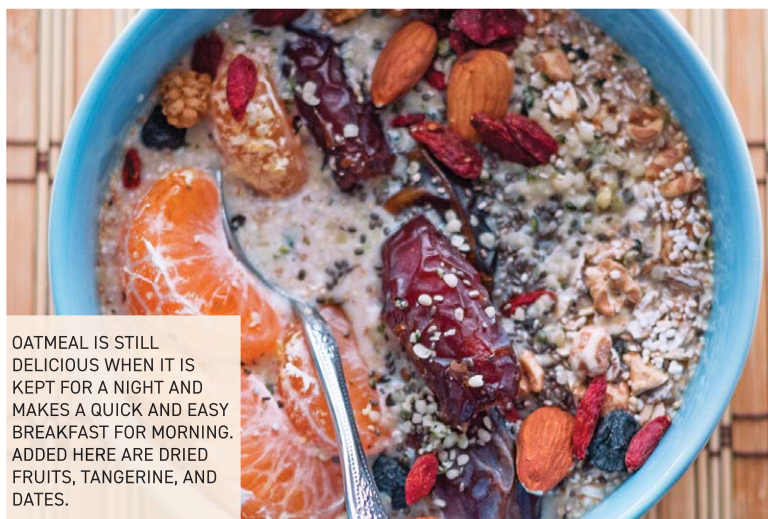
Dates have been around for thousands of years, but the fruit is now trending as an alternative natural sweetener. Whether it's date syrup, date paste, or dehydrated dates, the fruit is being used in a range of ways, from ketchup to overnight oats, according to [Whole Foods Markets](#).

## Yaupon

Yaupon is a caffeine-producing holly bush that can be found across the Southeastern U.S. The leaves can be used to make an herbal tea, which can then be incorporated into kombucha, cocktails, and other beverages.

## Crazy for kelp

Expect to see more kelp-inspired products on grocery store shelves in 2023, according to Whole Foods. Whether it's kelp chips or kelp noodles, algae is a nutritious, versatile product that's also good for the environment. Kelp can help absorb carbon in the atmosphere and doesn't require freshwater or added nutrients, two major wins in the age of climate consciousness. 



OATMEAL IS STILL DELICIOUS WHEN IT IS KEPT FOR A NIGHT AND MAKES A QUICK AND EASY BREAKFAST FOR MORNING. ADDED HERE ARE DRIED FRUITS, TANGERINE, AND DATES.



YAUPOON  
HOLLY  
BRANCH



CHUKA WAKAME SEAWEED  
SALAD SERVED WITH BLACK  
AND WHITE SESAME SEED,  
TOFU AND CHERRY TOMATO





# Seven Ways to Get Your Clients to Like You

Being a salesperson sometimes has a bad rap. People don't like to be "sold" and may unconsciously put up a wall even before you speak.

A part of life is knowing that there will always be something you can improve on. Now, in sales you need people to like you, and I have seven ways for you to do just that.

## #1 Mirroring

Mirroring is something we do both consciously and subconsciously. It's where we mimic the body language of another person, posture, expression, or even communication methods. It allows us to find new ways to relate to them and connect with them on a deeper level, and there are even neurons in our brains that are dedicated to helping us with this.

A client will almost instantly make their mind up whether they like or dislike you, and a lot of this can depend on how you express yourself in terms of body language. Not to mention that the vibes they send to you often get thrown back at them without you even thinking. So, it would be best if you led the charge; have them mirror you.

## #2 Body language

Body language is essential, and it is 70% of our communication with others. That's a huge number, right? As a salesperson, you must be mindful of your body language and your customer's actions. If they are in an unfavorable position, it likely means that they don't like what you are talking about, and you need to change the conversation. Move onto something they are interested in and watch their body language change with it.

You have to be quick with this, as it can be easy to miss and forget to read the non-verbal cues. It would help if you also remembered that there could

be subtle differences in the body language displayed by men and women so that a little extra research won't go amiss.

Just as the way the customer is acting is essential, so are your actions. If your body language screams insecurity and a lack of confidence, people will not have faith in you, and you will lose the job. Never keep your hands behind your back, as it's dismissive language, instead of using them to emphasize points and throw in some extra passion. Let the customer know that you are confident in yourself and your products.

Here are a few quick body language pointers to give you a head start:

- Crossed arms are a sign of discomfort, and the same goes for leaning away
- Leaning the body back with arms and legs spread is a sign of comfort, but it can also be a dominant and territorial display during serious discussions
- Placing your hands on a surface on either side of you is a sign of confidence and authority

- Placing your hands on your hips with your legs spread shows that you are ready for action
- Thumbs pointing in the air are usually a good sign
- Hands resting together with the fingertips touching tends to suggest confidence and power
- Fiddling with hair, jewelry, or anything, is a sign of discomfort, doubt, and insecurity
- Bobbing a crossed leg up and down while sitting tends to show discomfort
- Crossing one leg over the other while standing suggests comfort
- Pointing a foot upward while talking is usually a good sign

There are many other examples of body language, but these are the basics you need to remember.

### #3 Positive energy

You can't make sales with negative energy; it's just not something that happens. If you aren't positive, you will lose work, and it's as simple as that. You have to take a deep breath, stand up straight, and get directly into the pitch with good thoughts for the process and outcome. Tell yourself you have the job before you start, and the client will notice your confidence.

It links in with body language because you need to express that confidence further. You could be an expert in your field, but no one will notice if you carry yourself incorrectly. Be passionate, be positive, and show the customer what you're made of.

### #4 Humor

People like it when the person they are talking to feels human. We all make jokes, and I am a master of throwing them into my pitches and seminars. Let people know who you

are, and don't be afraid to show off that sense of humor a little. Of course, keep things tame, but you need to let customers relate to you.

### #5 Vulnerable

Being vulnerable is something that people love, and you need to be willing to do it. Being vulnerable is showing up and being seen, even if there are no guarantees, and doing so willingly. Vulnerability is a human trait that we all seem to respond to, and your potential customers are no different. Putting yourself out there, even when there is nothing to gain, is a great way to display just how motivated and devoted you are.

### #6 Mindset

Your mindset is so important, and I can't emphasize this enough. If you're saying that you can't do something instead of that you can, if you give up easily instead of putting the effort in, this needs to change. Success truly is a matter of mindset; if you have a negative one, you are far less likely to succeed.

Look for opportunities, and approach them positively and as though you have the job before you've even pitched. A customer will notice a proper mindset as much as they'll notice a poor one. Sales isn't just about technique; it is

also about your confidence and how you see yourself in business.

### #7 Commonality

Commonality is all about that middle ground, finding something that you and your customer share. It's not always easy, but the best way to do it is with a good old-fashioned internet stalking session. Look them up on social media, visit their website, and find out everything you can to relate to them better. Doing your homework looks good on you. It shows that you care, but it also means you have gone the extra mile to impress buyers and let them know you think they are worth your time.

### To conclude

Getting people to like you is more challenging than clicking your fingers, although we wish it were that easy. It would help if you put work and effort into it; this is precisely what I am here to help you with. By following these seven simple steps, you will be well on your way to becoming better liked, and even more confident. Just watch those new clients roll in.

Building a connection, a personal relationship, with people is exactly how you sell your services. People will always judge you first and your service second, so you have to get out there with the intention of connecting. 



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



\*  
by John Lombardo

# How High-Tech Complements High-Touch

## Caterers' IT tools to improve customer communication and service

**There is no doubt that progress in technology has allowed great advances in every field of business and customer service. But it's now up to you to use technology to free up interaction time with your guests, while being more effective with your employee practices.**

However, you must avoid the trap of thinking that apps, software, or the like are an appropriate replacement for excellent guest service and communication.

Many of the following measures can be implemented by any caterer whether large volume or small independents; in either case the recurring lamentation is the same: "I don't have enough time!" By using these techniques, you can cut down on the time wasters and improve your quality of time spent.

### Contractual forms & credit card pre-authorization

Capturing digital signatures, zero-dollar credit card pre-authorization, and secure online payments that are PCI (Payment Card Industry) compliant will significantly reduce both time and paperwork storage, regardless of what other system(s)

you use. Chargebacks can virtually be eliminated, and several systems integrate with HubSpot and Salesforce. I was personally involved in a catering operation that held large holiday brunches for 700–1,000 people and using this system for reservations reduced the number of no-shows from an average of 5–7% to zero. Major players in this area include Sertifi and Canary.

### Event floorplan software

In addition to the layout of tables and ancillary items, user-facing options allow guests to input seating assignments and entree selections, a major marketing feature. The two big players are Social Tables and AllSeated. Some catering software, like Caterease, have their own seating program embedded, or alternatively interface with a seating program so that diagrams are attached to the events.

### Kitchen

Food costing and production using recipes is one of the biggest challenges, plus it is particularly important to address as we combat fluctuating price changes and labor



issues. Cheftec is one the powerhouse programs for larger operations who can support it. Suppliers like Sysco, Gordons, and US Foods also provide free software to their clients and can include ingredients other than what they sell to you. Features can include scalable recipes, shopping lists, inventory, export to QuickBooks/Excel, and alarms for exceeding food cost thresholds.

### Online staffing solution

There are many staff scheduling programs available, but a specialized on-/off-site catering solution offers event-specific features. Some of the features in these programs include timekeeping/payroll, the ability to rate staff by skill level, custom tag searches, and help accommodating staffing agencies. Many caterers use QuickBooks and interfaces are available for any accounting software where a .CSV file can be imported. The two major players are Nowsta and StaffMate.

### Communication apps

Want to be able to text or voice message your chef, sous chef, and banquet manager instantly, while at the same time having the ability for anyone to replay the message so details don't get lost? These instant communication



**John Lombardo, CHA** is a senior consultant with Certified Catering Consultants and is a veteran hospitality industry executive. His successful career includes managing privately-owned businesses and four- and five-star level corporate hotel properties. A combination of practical skills honed by opening and turning around properties ranging from locations in Maui, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and elsewhere across the continental U.S., combined with a degree from Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration

provide John with a unique ability to understand many facets of hospitality. His additional experience owning several hospitality businesses complements his overall understanding of how to address the challenges that owners and managers face today. John can also communicate effectively to Spanish-speaking staff.



programs simulate two-way radios, or Push-to-talk (PTT) and allow 1:1 or 1:group communication via voice or text-style and feature many free robust features. Another advantage is that contrary to standard two-way radios, any headphone/ear bud device that functions with your phone can be used. It also works across city, state, and even US/Canada boundaries as seamlessly as if everyone were in the immediate vicinity. Download these apps to your phone: Zello, Glide, Mumble, and Voxer.

### Remote desktop application

Microsoft has significantly improved their game in Windows 11 with a rebranded application—just click on the magnifying glass and enter “Quick Assist” to share your computer with yourself while in an appointment. No longer will your sales staff have to run back and forth from office to appointment to check available dates and other details. They can also enter information on the spot, rather than take notes and transfer it later. Plus, imagine not needing your IT department to handle remote access. There are also other free methods such as Google Chrome Remote Desktop, GoToMyPC, etc.

### CRM systems

A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system helps manage customer data. It supports



sales management, integrates with social media, and facilitates communication. Salesforce, Hubspot, and others require more time and sophistication. There are currently three types of CRMs, each of which addresses diverse needs. PC Magazine has a good list of systems for smaller businesses.

### Employee training efficiency

The majority of catering operations are seasonal, and therefore ramping up staff by 25–50% is common. Scheduling people for on-site training can consume many hours, and it is often a time burden to the managers and employees participating, as well

**“YOU MUST AVOID THE TRAP OF THINKING THAT APPS, SOFTWARE, ETC. ARE AN APPROPRIATE REPLACEMENT FOR EXCELLENT GUEST SERVICE AND COMMUNICATION.”**

as a costly measure. The free app Google Classroom can easily be formatted into a structured lesson with a variety of ways to hold individual or group sessions remotely and can even include tests.

### Guest reviews (reputation management/fulfillment)

Answering every guest review is important; if feedback arrives by email, using a service to respond could save considerable time without sacrificing the personal touch. You can craft a series of appropriate responses for the service to use, and then you will see the responses in editable format before they are sent. You can also specify that extremely critical comments come directly to you. Organized dashboards with summary results and detailed reports are also included. Existing highly ranked systems include Travel Media Group, Revinate, and GuestRevu. 



## EVENT SOLUTIONS

By Amber Kispert



CHEF JI HYE KIM (MISS KIM) WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SECOND COURSE OF THE EVENING, CLAM JOOK WITH CORN AND ZUCCHINI. A VEGAN VERSION OF THE DISH WAS ALSO AVAILABLE: MUSHROOM JOOK WITH CORN AND ZUCCHINI. INGREDIENTS FOR THE DISH WERE SOURCED FROM THE FOLLOWING FARMS: GROWING HOPE AND THE UGANDAN COMMUNITY OF MICHIGAN FARMING PROJECT.



FOUR APPETIZERS (AND THEIR VEGAN COUNTERPARTS) WERE SERVED DURING A 25-PERSON VIP RECEPTION PRIOR TO THE 13 MILLION ACRES DINING EXPERIENCE. SHOWN IS CHEF JI HYE KIM'S (MISS KIM) SCALLOP, CRISPY PORK, SHISO, AND TOMATO SKEWER.



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# Coming Together Over

*Iconoclast Dinner Experience  
and Zingerman's Cornman Farms  
partner together for 13 Million  
Acres culinary event*

All photos courtesy V.W Photography

Food has oftentimes been called the great connector. No matter our backgrounds, no matter where we're from, food and its importance in our history is something that we all share.

"Food is one of our deepest connections to our past generations and culture. It is our verbal history passed down to us from our families. Food is something that connects us all and allows us to have many different conversations on so many different

levels," Chef Kim said. "It's easy to focus on flavors, familiar connection."

Food can also serve as evidenced during the event organized by Iconoclast (founded by Dr. J. Zingerman's in partnership with winning 27-acre managed and op





CHEF OSCAR MORENO (MEXO) PREPARED THE FOURTH COURSE OF THE EVENING: TEJUINO MARINATED DUCK BREAST WITH BI-COLOR PAKUA, AND MOLE NEGRO. THE VEGAN OPTION INCLUDED TAMAL SPHERE, CUITLACOCHÉ, GARBANZO PULQUE SALSA, AND NOPAL ACTUS. INGREDIENTS SOURCED FROM LOCAL FARMS INCLUDED BORAGE, CALENDULA, AND CHIVES (GROWING HOPE); CILANTRO, PEPERILLOS, AND POBLANOS (CADILLAC URBAN GARDENS); ARUGULA AND SLICING TOMATOES (OAKLAND AVENUE URBAN FARMS)

# r Food

Kieron Hales (Cornman Farms) says. Focus on differences too often, but shared ingredients, and food stories build

serve as a bridge between cultures. During 13 Million Acres, a culinary event by the Iconoclast Dinner Experience (co-founded by Lezli Levene Harvell in 2015) in Cornman Farms, a historic, award-winning event venue in Ann Arbor, MI, operated by Zingerman's group.



NATALIA DE MIGUEL (AVENTURA), THE EVENING'S MIXOLOGIST, WORKS TO PERFECT HER SIGNATURE COCKTAILS.



CORNMAN FARMS IS AN HISTORIC, AWARD-WINNING 27-ACRE EVENT VENUE, KITCHEN, AND PICTURESQUE ESTATE MINUTES AWAY FROM DOWNTOWN ANN ARBOR, MI, THAT IS PART OF THE LEGENDARY ZINGERMANN'S GROUP AND IS A MEMBER OF THE LEADING CATERERS OF AMERICA. CO-FOUNDED BY BRITISH CHEF AND RECIPE DEVELOPER KIERON HALES, IT IS A ONE-OF-A-KIND EVENT VENUE BROUGHT TO LIFE BY HALES' PASSION OF BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER OVER FOOD. THE PROPERTY ITSELF EMITS AN ESSENCE OF NOSTALGIA, BETWEEN ITS RESTORED BARN AND PICTURESQUE WHITE FARMHOUSE, SWEEPING LAWN ADORNED WITH SUNFLOWERS AND BIG MAPLE TREES, AND A FARMHOUSE KITCHEN WHIPPING UP FRESH BAKED GOODS DAILY.

**“It’s easy to focus on differences too often, but shared flavors, familiar ingredients and food stories build connection.”**

— CHEF KIERON HALES, CORNMAN FARMS





THE FEATURED CHEFS DURING 13 MILLION ACRES, FROM LEFT: OSCAR MORENO (MEXO), JI HYE KIM (MISS KIM), GEORGE AZAR (FLOWERS OF VIETNAM), KIKI LOUYA, KIERON HALES (CORNMAN FARMS), NATALIA DE MIGUEL (AVENTURA), AND APRIL ANDERSON (GOOD CAKES AND BAKES).

## 13 Million Acres

Since its inception in 2015, the Iconoclast Dinner Experience (IDE) has curated paradigm shifting programming that celebrates diverse culinary and beverage professionals.

“I’m a lover of culture and I found culinary culture to be very homogeneous,” says Harvell.

For the 13 Million Acres event, Harvell wanted to explore the legacy of dispossessed land that African American farmers and Mexican Americans in the West share through the sourcing of ingredients from African American and Mexican American owned and operated farms in Detroit and Washtenaw County, such as Growing Hope, Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, and We The People Opportunity Farm.

“It’s an entire weekend of the chefs interacting with the farmers that

really culminates with that dinner,” says Harvell.

The courses and crafted cocktails were then prepared by some of Michigan’s most talented culinary and beverage professionals. The line-up included Hales as well as chefs April Anderson (Good Cakes and Bakes), George Azar (Flowers of Vietnam), Ji Hye Kim (Miss Kim), Kiki Louya, Oscar Moreno (MeXo), and mixologist Natalia de Miguel (Aventura.)

“When (Harvell) shared that she found a lack of representation of chefs of color in the higher echelons of culinary culture,” says Hales, “her experience matched my own, and I was eager to help change that.”

All proceeds from the event benefited Spelman College, a historically Black liberal arts college for women, and Harvell’s alma mater.



SMALL RUSTIC DETAILS IN THE FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS HELPED EMBRACE THE EVENT’S FARMSTEAD LOCALE.

## Inspired cuisine

To assist chefs in getting their creative juices flowing for what to prepare, Harvell not only provided a list of ingredients that they could incorporate into their dishes based on what the partner farms were able to provide, but she also supplied excerpts and themes that each chef could choose from which they would then interpret into their culinary creations.

“They could choose which course, and what aspect of history resonated with them,” Harvell says. “It wasn’t just a dinner; it’s about telling a story.”

For example, Chef Ji Hye Kim (Miss Kim) was given an excerpt from the Treaty of Guadalupe, which brought an end to the Mexican American War. For the dish, Kim prepared a clam jook (similar to porridge) with zucchini.

“To her, she connected with the idea of losing a country and the idea of ‘how can I comfort this person who has experienced this sense of loss,’” Harvell says, “which led to her clam jook as that was often served during times of sickness as a way to comfort.”

Hales, however, had a different assignment. As the host chef for the event, Harvell assigned him an excerpt from the “Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman (President Biden’s inaugural poem).





DURING THE VIP RECEPTION, CHEF OSCAR MORENO (MEXO) PRESENTED QUAIL BREAST LOLLIPOPS WITH ZAPÓTECO MOLE. THE VEGAN OPTION FOR THE EVENING WAS A VEGAN FRITTER WITH FABA BEANS AND EPAZOTE.



CHEF APRIL ANDERSON (GOOD CAKES AND BAKES) WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EVENING'S DESSERT: VANILLA BEAN PANNA COTTA, AND SALTED CARAMEL APPLE. THE VEGAN OPTION FEATURED A SALTED CARAMEL APPLE PIE TRIFLE.



CHEF GEORGE AZAR (FLOWERS OF VIETNAM) PRESENTED CHARRED CORN WITH JAPANESE CITRUS EMULSION, AND CHILE DURING A VIP RECEPTION PRIOR TO THE 13 MILLION ACRES DINNER EXPERIENCE.



THE PROGRAM FOR 13 MILLION ACRES EMBRACED THE AESTHETIC OF THE EVENT'S LOCALE AT CORNMAN FARMS BY USING NEUTRAL TONES AND RUSTIC-STYLE LETTERING.



CHEF KIERON HALES SERVED AS HOST CHEF AND WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EVENING'S FIRST COURSE, A MUSHROOM ROULADE, FEATURING LOCAL INGREDIENTS: ONIONS, BASIL, CALENDULA (GROWING HOPE); THYME (CADILLAC URBAN GARDENS); GARLIC, SPINACH, AND ROSEMARY (OAKLAND AVENUE URBAN FARMS).





THE THIRD DISH FOR THE EVENING, FROM CHEF KIKI LOUYA, WAS A FISH KOFTA WITH MOLOKHIEH, YOGURT, AND POMEGRANATE. THE VEGAN OPTION FEATURED LENTIL KOFTA, MOLOKHIEH, CASHEW CREAM, AND POMEGRANATE. INGREDIENTS SOURCED FROM LOCAL FARMS INCLUDED PARSLEY, LOVAGE, SPEARMINT, ONION, CALENDULA, CAYENNE, GARLIC (GROWING HOPE); CILANTRO (CADILLAC URBAN GARDENS); DETROIT RED BEETS AND SPINACH (OAKLAND AVENUE URBAN FARMS).



DURING THE VIP RECEPTION CHEF JI HYE KIM (MISS KIM) SERVED A SCALLOP, CRISPY PORK, SHISO, AND TOMATO SKEWER.



THE VEGAN VERSION OF CHEF JI HYE KIM (MISS KIM) APPETIZER DURING THE VIP RECEPTION FEATURED SILKEN TOFU, AVOCADO, TOMATO, AND SHISO.



NATALIA DE MIGUEL (AVENTURA) CONCOCTED A NUMBER OF SIGNATURE COCKTAILS THROUGHOUT THE EVENT, FEATURING SUCH SPIRITS AS BELL PEPPER AND JALAPEÑO INFUSED MEZCAL, CHAMOMILE-INFUSED RITTENHOUSE RYE, CACAO NIB-INFUSED TEQUILA OCHO REPOSADO, BACON FAT-WASHED ELIJAH CRAIG BOURBON, AS WELL AS PLENTY OF FRESH INGREDIENTS.

*The verse reads:*

*If we're to live up to our own time,  
then victory won't lie in the blade.  
But in all the bridges we've made,  
that is the promise to glade,  
the hill we climb.*

*If only we dare.*

*It's because being American is more  
than a pride we inherit,  
it's the past we step into  
and how we repair it.*

"When I read this excerpt about allyship, I knew I wanted to do something with mushrooms because they represent strength, longevity, and transformation," Hales says. "It reminds me of childhood and family and feeling supported."

Hales prepared a Mushroom Roulade.

Guests to the dining experience could learn more about Harvell's selected excerpts, each chef's dish, and their interpretation by scanning a QR code in the evening's program.

"I don't like menus to be overly explanatory in copy," says Harvell. "I want the guests and chefs to think of this as an acoustic concert because these are very intimate settings."

Harvell says she hopes to continue offering IDE events going forward because they are a great way to bridge cultures.

"By bringing different groups together we can use food as an accessible entry point to discuss more nuanced cultural topics," she says. "They're not just here to eat food, it's a combination of in-polite conversation and experiential—all kicking off a journey of exploring."



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# Southern Comfort

**DELICACIES FROM 'DOWN SOUTH' ARE A FAR CRY FROM THE FRIED AND GREASY OPTIONS THAT MANY EXPECT.**



BAKED BEANS ARE A SOUTHERN TRADITION. SHOWN: WATERMELON BAKED BEANS WITH WATERMELON BARBECUE SAUCE. PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD



BOLD CATERING & DESIGN OFFERS A "TASTE OF PEACHTREE" MENU WHICH FEATURES ALL-TIME ATLANTA FAVORITES, INCLUDING BAKED MACARONI AND CHEESE. PHOTO COURTESY BOLD CATERING & DESIGN

## HONEY CAKE

Recipe and photo courtesy Chef Todd Ruiz,  
The RK Group

### INGREDIENTS

4 cups butter, softened  
8 cups all-purpose flour  
1 tsp salt  
½ tsp nutmeg  
1 tsp ground ginger  
10 ea. eggs  
3 tsp vanilla extract  
3 cups sugar  
2 cups honey

### METHOD

1. Heat oven to 325 degrees.
2. Butter silicon molds, lightly dust molds with flour and shake out excess.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, salt, and nutmeg and set aside. In another bowl whisk eggs, vanilla, and set aside.
4. In electric mixer fitted with paddle attachment, beat butter on medium

high until fluffy and light, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add sugar and honey, beat again until mixture is light and fluffy.

5. Add eggs mixture a few tablespoons at a time, beating well for about two to three minutes.
6. Raise speed on mixture to high and beat until thick and a light color, about four to five minutes.
7. Add flour in three batches, beating to just combine after each addition
8. Bake in oven until fully cooked and slightly golden brown.

### INGREDIENTS FOR HONEY ICING

1½ cups powdered sugar  
6 tsp milk  
6 tsp honey

### METHOD

Mix all ingredients well.



"CHICKEN ON A STICK" WITH KOMBUCHA HOT SAUCE, AND CELERY ROOT SLAW FROM CHEF MEREDITH CLINTON WITH BLACK SHEEP CATERING (MEMPHIS). PHOTO COURTESY CATERSOURCE STAFF

**F**or some, southern cuisine is like a warm hug igniting memories of home and childhood. For others, it's bold flavors that interact in exciting ways. There are so many different ways to look at

southern cuisine because there are so many different ways to define it. All delicious, but all distinctly different. However, there is one thing that connects them all together: "Down South' cuisine, to me, is all about generosity and hospitality," says

Kat Gordon with Muddy's Bake Shop (Memphis). "Growing up in the south I was surrounded by folks whose love language was sharing food. The cuisine varies but there's an underlying sense of community, resourcefulness, and graciousness that infuses it. What gives the food that distinctive 'flavor' is the care taken in preparing and serving it."



## Southern styles

Traditionally, southern cuisine can be broken down into six styles: Soul Food, Cajun, Creole, Gullah, Low Country, and Floribbean.

“Growing up in South Texas, having a large family in the Louisiana area, and spending several years in

the Florida Georgia line, Southern cuisine has a far stretch,” Chef Todd Ruiz (The RK Group) says. “I think back to my roots of Tex Mex, barbecue, and those influences of Cajun and Creole cuisine that influenced my upbringing. Boudin, cracklins and crawfish boils were prominent. Then moving to the

Florida/Georgia area of the US and experiencing a whole other version of Southern food. Floribbean flavors, Low Country shrimp boils, shrimp and grits, whole hog cooking, fresh oysters, local shrimp, pimento cheese, corn bread, and boiled peanuts all are part of my culinary experiences and repertoire.”

### CORNFLAKE-CRUSTED CHICKEN & WAFFLES & SLAW

**YIELD: 4 SERVINGS**

*Recipe and photo courtesy  
Chef Grant MacPherson*

#### INGREDIENTS FOR SLAW

- 4 cups grapeseed oil (or other neutral oil)
- 2 cups grated cabbage
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated carrots
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup mayonnaise
- 2 T red wine vinegar
- 2 T chopped fresh curly or flat-leaf parsley
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

#### METHOD

1. In a large bowl, toss the cabbage and carrots.
2. In a small bowl, whisk the mayonnaise, vinegar, and parsley. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Toss the cabbage and carrots with the dressing and set aside.

#### INGREDIENTS FOR CHICKEN AND WAFFLES

- 8 ea. skinless, bone-in chicken (4 legs, 4 thighs)
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups all-purpose flour, divided
- 5 large eggs divided
- 4 cups cornflakes, crushed
- 2 T sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cups buttermilk
- 6 T unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Nonstick cooking spray
- Honey, for drizzling



#### METHOD

1. Preheat a deep fryer or large heavy-bottomed pot filled with the grapeseed oil to 375 degrees F.
2. Over high heat, bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the chicken to the boiling water and boil for about 5 minutes. Use tongs to transfer the chicken to a paper-towel lined baked sheeting and pat dry.
3. On a large plate, add 1 cup of flour. In a medium shallow bowl, beat 3 of the eggs. On another large plate, add the crushed cornflakes. Dredge all of the chicken pieces in the flour, shaking off the excess. Dip them in the eggs, letting any excess drip off. Coat them in the cornflakes.
4. Fry the encrusted chicken in a few small batches, do not overcrowd them, for 3 to 4 minutes, until golden brown. Use tongs to transfer the chicken to a paper towel-lined baking sheet. When all of the chicken has been fried, remove and discard the paper towels.
5. In a large bowl, whisk together the remaining flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp of salt, making sure there are no lumps. In a medium bowl, whisk together the remaining eggs, buttermilk, melted butter, and vanilla extract until fully incorporated. Slowly whisk the buttermilk mixture into the bowl of dry ingredients.

Whisk to incorporate but do not overmix. Let the batter rest for about 10 minutes.

6. Preheat waffle iron to medium-high, and lightly oil with cooking spray. Pour  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups of batter into the iron based on its size. Close the top and cook for 4 or 5 minutes, or until golden brown and crispy. Transfer the waffle to the oven rack to keep warm and repeat with the remaining batter.
7. To serve, set one waffle off-center on each plate. Place coleslaw across from the waffle and lean 2 pieces of chicken against each waffle. Drizzle everything with honey.

## Soul Food

This style of cooking was first developed in the deep south in slave quarters of Southern plantations where families used simple ingredients and simple cooking techniques which produced complex flavors.

A few signature dishes associated with Soul Food include:

- **Mains:** fried chicken, fried fish, ham hocks, pig's feet, and pork ribs
- **Sides:** stewed greens (mustard greens, turnip greens, collard greens, and seasoned meat), Black-eyed peas, candied yams, macaroni and cheese, and cornbread
- **Desserts:** peach cobbler, sweet potato pie, banana pudding, or pound cake

## Cajun

Cajun cuisine came from the descendants of French Canadians (aka Arcadians), who migrated to Southern Louisiana in the mid-1700s. Cajun cuisine is defined by its use of locally available ingredients and simple preparations. The most common cooking styles for Cajun cuisine are either barbecue, smoking, stewing, deep frying, or grilling.

A few popular Cajun dishes include:

- Dirty Rice (cooked rice made with chicken giblets, ground chicken liver, onions, green bell peppers, and celery)
- Jambalaya (a one-pot meat-and-rice dish made of ham, shrimp, crawfish, sausage, rice, tomatoes, green bell peppers, onions, and seasonings)

- Boudin Sausage (unsmoked pork sausage made with rice, green onion, parsley, and seasonings)

## Creole

Creole is somewhat like Cajun in that it is associated with cooking techniques from France. The primary difference between the two is that Creole uses tomatoes and tomato-based sauces, while Cajun food usually doesn't.

Common and well-known types of Creole foods are:

- Crabmeat
- Oysters
- Gumbo
- Crawfish Étouffée (fresh crawfish, onions, celery, tomato sauce, and rice)
- Bread pudding (stale French bread, milk, eggs, sugar, vanilla extract, butter, cinnamon, and nutmeg)



## BREAD & BUTTER PICKLES

*Recipe and photo courtesy  
Chef Todd Ruiz, The RK Group*

### INGREDIENTS

- 25 boxes Persian cucumbers
- 15 ea. onions, sliced
- 20 ea. shallots, sliced
- 50 ea. garlic, crushed
- 3 cups pickling spice
- 3 cups fennel seed
- 2 bunches fresh thyme
- 2 cups black peppercorns
- 2 tsp cloves
- 6 gal white wine vinegar
- 3 gal water
- 9 qt sugar
- 3 qt salt

### METHOD

1. Dry roast onions, shallots, garlic, pickling spice, fennel seed, thyme, peppercorns, and cloves for 15 minutes.
2. Place aromatics into a cheesecloth.
3. In a tilt skillet add water, vinegar, sugar, salt, and aromatics over high heat. Stir until sugar is fully dissolved.
4. Pour over cucumbers and seal tightly.
5. Hold for two days before serving.





FORGET THE CLASSIC BUFFET BBQ SETUP—TRADE IT FOR A SAVORY SUNDAE. GRAB A PAIL AND YOUR GUESTS CAN FEAST THEIR EYES ON THEIR CHOICE OF BASE, FROM MASHED POTATOES TO MAC AND CHEESE, BEFORE PICKING THEIR PROTEIN, WHETHER IT'S SMOKED PORK SHOULDER, ROASTED PULLED CHICKEN OR SMOKED BEEF BRISKET. GET LOST IN THE SAUCE, WITH OPTIONS FROM HONEY BROWN SUGAR AND NORTH CAROLINA VINEGAR TO MANGO CHIPOTLE, AND TOP IT ALL OFF WITH COLESLAW, CHEESE, PICKLED OR FRESH JALAPENOS OR CORN. LIKE A TRUE SUNDAE, IT'S NOT COMPLETE WITHOUT A MOONSHINE-SOAKED CHERRY ON TOP. PHOTO COURTESY BOLD CATERING & DESIGN

## Gullah

Gullah cuisine was created by former slaves who migrated to the coastal districts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Northeast Florida after the Civil War, and is very influenced by West African cuisine.

Popular Gullah dishes include:

- Groundnut Soup aka peanut soup (chicken or vegetable broth, peanut butter, evaporated milk, sautéed onions, and seasonings)
- Gullah Rice (diced chicken breast, chopped tomatoes, chicken or vegetable broth, diced carrots, diced green bell peppers, rice, corn kernels, salt, garlic powder, and black pepper).

## Low Country

Low Country cuisine is traditionally associated with Georgia and South Carolina. This cuisine uses a lot of seafood and strongly resembles Creole and Cajun cuisine.

Popular dishes in Low Country cuisine include:

- Rice
- Sweet potato and crab soup
- Okra soup
- Catfish stew
- Shrimp and grits
- Oyster roast
- Macaroni and cheese
- Fried cabbage

- She-crab Soup (fresh female crab meat, milk, heavy cream, butter, Worcestershire sauce, white pepper, and crab roe)

## Floribbean

“Floribbean” cuisine marries Asian and Caribbean (Cuban and Haitian) cooking methods with an emphasis on extremely fresh ingredients, spices, seafood and poultry, and the use of fresh fruits and juices.

Popular ingredients and flavors in Floribbean cuisine include:

- Mango
- Papaya
- Rum
- Almond
- Coconut
- Key lime
- Honey
- Seafood
- Chicken
- Pineapple
- Beans
- Rice
- Yucca

The above information was collected from [Katom](#) and [Prepared Foods](#).

## Fresh, flaky, and fried

Amongst most consumers, there is a common misperception that all southern cuisine puts an over

emphasis on fat and grease, and that everything has to be fried.

“People tend to think of ‘Down South’ as all barbeque, gravy, and mac and cheese,” says Gordon.

“They’re not wrong, we have a lot of all that, but it’s far from the whole story. Lots of people assume that Southern cooking is super fatty and greasy; I think we’re certainly not afraid to use fat, but we also love freshness and flavor. In my experience the best ‘Down South’ cooking respects fat as a flavor and texture booster but doesn’t use it to smother natural flavors and textures.”

Many southern dishes focus on fresh, local ingredients—seafood, fresh fruits and vegetables, and other regional ingredients.

“To me, when talking about southern cuisine I think purple hull peas, fresh tomatoes off the vine with just a sprinkle of salt, warm biscuits dripping with butter, and oyster dressing at holidays,” Gordon says.

The south is most often associated with rich, savory dishes, but sweets can play just as important of a role at the dinner table.

“‘Down South’ really sings when it comes to flaky, buttery pies mounded with in-season fruit, and decadent pound cakes with a dollop of fresh whipped cream. And rustic cobblers, crisps, and crumbles! And pecan everything,” Gordon says.



## “SHADY WAKE” SOUTHERN PECAN PIE

*Recipe and photo courtesy Kat Gordon,  
Muddy's Bake Shop*

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 par-baked pie shell \*
- 2 large eggs
- 67 g plain sugar
- 80 g light brown sugar
- 167 g dark Karo syrup
- 75 g unsalted butter
- 3 g pure vanilla extract
- Fat pinch kosher salt
- 240 g toasted pecan pieces\*\*

### METHOD

1. In a large, heat proof bowl (such as a wide Pyrex) beat the eggs.
2. In a saucepan over medium heat, combine the sugar, brown sugar, syrup, and butter. Stir constantly and heat until it comes barely to a boil- bubbling, but not rolling.
3. While whisking the eggs, slowly pour in the hot syrup mixture. Do not stop whisking as you pour and don't just dump it all in or else you'll cook the

eggs and end up with a sugary egg scramble!

4. Add the vanilla and salt and stir well. Allow the filling to cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally.
5. While the filling cools, toast your pecan pieces and par-bake your pie crust.

### \*\*TO PAR-BAKE A CRUST

1. Using a fork, prick lightly about 6 times evenly around the pie. Line completely with foil (make sure to press foil into the fluting if edges are fluted). Partially fill with pie weights (or use dried beans). Bake at 375 degrees for 15 minutes. Remove dried beans and foil, brush with egg wash (optional), and proceed with your pie's recipe.

### \*\*TO TOAST PECAN PIECES

1. Spread out on a foil lined baking sheet and toast 350 degree oven approximately 6-9 minutes. You should be able to smell their pleasant aroma when you open the oven, but they shouldn't look scorched or blackened.



2. When you're ready to assemble the pie, spread the pecans in the bottom of the crust, then carefully pour the filling over the pecans. Bake at 350 for 35-45 minutes. When finished, the crust should be a deep bronzed color and the filling should be set with a slight jiggle—not hard or stiff.
3. Let cool to room temperature and enjoy. Option to serve with boozy whipped cream!

### INGREDIENTS FOR BOOZY WHIPPED CREAM

- 1 cup cold heavy whipping cream
- 2 T sugar
- ½ tsp vanilla
- 1 tsp bourbon or dark rum

### METHOD

Combine all ingredients in very clean glass, Pyrex, or metal bowl with NO GREASE OR OIL ON IT and beat with a hand mixer (or if you really want to get a work out, do it with a whisk) for several minutes until billowy peaks form.

### RECIPE NOTES

- **Pie shell:** This recipe is best suited for either a 9" "deep style" tin or a shallower 10" aluminum pie tin.
- **Pecan pieces:** I prefer to use pieces rather than whole or halves. I find that when I toast them, there's more pecan exposed to the toasting, which brings out more flavor. Also, the pie itself is a little easier to slice with pieces rather than big ole' hunks of pecan!
- **Bourbon:** some folks love a pecan pie with bourbon flavor. Just add 2-3 tsp bourbon along with the vanilla. Inhale the aroma once it's mixed in and if it smells how you want it to taste, you're good to go.





## SORGHUM GLAZED AMERICAN LAMB CHOPS, BLACK EYED PEAS, AND PICKLED MUSTARD GREENS

*Recipe courtesy Chef Jammir Gry, Compline Restaurant*

*Photo courtesy American Lamb Board*

### INGREDIENTS FOR SORGHUM GLAZE

- 1 cup sorghum
- 2 T garlic, minced
- 2 T shallots, minced
- 2 T apple cider vinegar
- 2 T whole grain mustard
- Salt, as needed
- Ground black pepper, as needed

### METHOD

In a small pan simmer all ingredients together on low until syrupy, about 10-15 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

### INGREDIENTS FOR PICKLED MUSTARD GREENS

- 1 pt apple cider vinegar
- 1 pt water
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup salt
- 1 tsp yellow mustard seeds
- 1 ea. garlic clove, sliced thin
- 1 qt mustard leaves, cleaned and loosely packed

### METHOD

1. In a medium size pot, boil together the apple cider vinegar, water, sugar, salt, yellow mustard seeds and garlic. Once it boils, stir in the mustard leaves.
2. Remove from the heat and let it come to room temperature before refrigerating.

### INGREDIENTS FOR BLACK-EYED PEAS

- 2 oz salt pork, small dice
- 1 cup yellow onion, small dice
- ½ cup celery, small dice
- ½ cup carrot, small dice
- 2 T garlic, minced
- 1 lb dried black-eyed peas, cleaned and soaked overnight

### METHOD

1. In a medium pot, brown the salt pork until it begins to turn golden brown. Add in the yellow onion, celery, carrot and continue to sauté until the vegetables are soft. Add garlic and cook until fragrant.
2. Add the black-eyed peas and enough water to cover the beans by an inch. Turn the heat on high and once they

start to boil, turn the heat down to low. Cook until tender.

### INGREDIENTS FOR AMERICAN LAMB CHOPS

- 2 ea. American lamb rack, frenched and cut into double chops
- Salt, as needed
- Ground black pepper, as needed

### METHOD

1. Season the double lamb chops with salt and pepper. Cook on a hot grill until desired temperature, turning as needed to brown all sides.
2. In the last minute before the lamb is done brush the lamb with the Sorghum Glaze, making sure to get all the sides. Remove from the heat and allow the lamb to rest.
3. To assemble: Cut the rack into single chops and plate with the Black-Eyed Peas. Garnish with the Pickled Mustard Leaves and additional Sorghum Glaze.



## PIMENTO CHEESE

*Recipe and photo courtesy Chef Todd Ruiz,  
The RK Group*

### INGREDIENTS

1 ea. log cream cheese  
1 (28 oz) can pimento peppers  
1 cup dill pickles  
Juice from 1 lemon  
Zest from 1 lemon  
3 dashes hot sauce (or tabasco)  
Blackening season  
1 qt feather shredded cheddar cheese  
½ qt shredded mozzarella  
1 T salt  
1 tsp pepper

### METHOD

1. Drain pimento peppers well, pat dry slightly if needed
2. Place cream cheese and lemon juice into food processor and allow to mix and soften by pulsing a few times
3. Put pickles and pimento pepper into processor and pulse until well incorporated
4. Pulse in shredded cheese and salt and pepper
5. Leave pimento cheese semi chunky



## Food as a feeling

A common opinion amongst chefs who specialize in southern fare is that the secret ingredients are heart and soul.

"Southern cooking has to have a lot of heart and it has to have a lot of soul, and that's something you can't replicate," says Chef Jimmy Gentry with Paradox Catering & Consulting (Memphis). "A recipe is a recipe, but you have to give it a heart, you have to give it a soul because if you're not putting your love into it, it's not going to be what it's supposed to be."

"Southern cooking is about family and food that isn't fussy, but you have still taken the time to prepare," says Leslie LaSorsa with Crave Catering (Austin). "It has layers of flavor, creaminess and other textures."

But don't expect recipes to play too much of a role in southern cuisine though.

"Overall, I think 'Down South' cooking and baking tends to be somewhat intuitive—we have our recipes, but there's a certain willingness to experiment, substitute, adapt, and borrow," Gordon says. "It's that special kind of 'taste and see' that I love and appreciate."

It's that need for soul and heart that has made southern cuisine quite unlike anything else.

"You can feel it when you take a bite of something and it resonates in your bones," says Chef Kelly English (Memphis). "There's a real history and purpose with the food we associate with the south." 





# Kitchen Hierarchy: To Be or Not to Be? That is the Question

Way back in the 1800s when Escoffier developed the Kitchen Brigade System (as showcased on Hulu's popular new television show *The Bear*), it was a great idea to help establish order and hierarchy in the kitchen of hotels and restaurants. This age-old system has been the foundation in the culinary world that delineates the titles, job responsibilities, and departments in our kitchens today. Or does it?

While we embrace the kitchen brigade system with our titles, we feel strongly that teamwork and culture are a more important "system" to embrace. Our kitchen has a team of 17 full-time and 10 part-time employees. They work in small quarters, often cutting board to cutting board. What's great about this environment is that it breeds a creative, collaborative approach as there is no way that they can help but work in tandem. It's like a delicate, thoughtful, and compassionate dance that we've seen to be a very successful recipe for our success!

## Breaking the rules

**When I think** about how we "break the rules" of the brigade, I'd say the following things are what keeps

the smiles on our teams' faces and has them excited about coming to work. Additionally, while there are managers that are held accountable for each department, at the end of the day we expect that they will run their departments with a team mentality rather than a hierarchy. Every member of our team contributes to the success of what we do and we need to celebrate and embrace that.

### 1. We are all about communication.

When you communicate well, set expectations, determine goals, and ask for follow through you empower your team to do their job and feel like you trust them. When they feel trusted to do their jobs, they feel empowered to take ownership and pride in what they

do. We encourage this way of managing our team and see that they go way above the call of duty when they feel like they are trusted.

**2. Everyone cross-trains in every position in the kitchen.** The importance of understanding what your coworkers do and having the ability to jump in and help when needed is critical to an environment that is structured around the culture of teamwork.

**3. Ongoing training that focuses on each person's strengths and individual interests is a great way to invest in their future.** By investing in your employees, you will see increased morale, lower turnover, and employees that are motivated to do a great job. What's great about this is that you have less turnover which creates a more stable environment. Stability boosts morale and if you think about it, it also cuts down on the stress of hiring newbies and the time it takes to train them, which is always a stressful and expensive thing.

**4. Speaking of expensive, money talks and we pay our team well, but great perks and benefits**

## “THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOUR COWORKERS DO AND HAVING THE ABILITY TO JUMP IN AND HELP WHEN NEEDED IS CRITICAL TO AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS STRUCTURED AROUND THE CULTURE OF TEAMWORK.”

are the icing on the cake that differentiates our company culture and keeps our team feeling happy and appreciated. Celebrating birthdays, team holiday celebrations, having team outings, volunteering for local nonprofit organizations as a team building exercise to enforce the importance of giving back to our community as a company, team wellness challenges, cooking competitions, family get-togethers, and investing in their future by taking them to conferences like Catersource + The Special Event and the Art of Catering Food.

5. **We encourage them to have a voice** and to contribute their creativity to our menus and presentations. Once again, we are enforcing the empowerment of taking ownership in our company and the importance of their opinions and ideas. It's our job to take employee ideas and feedback which seriously creates a culture where everyone feels valued and heard.
6. **Three times a week we support local restaurants and provide lunch for our entire team.** It's important for us to show our appreciation and gratitude for the long days and emotional stress that they are enduring. It also creates a family meal twice a week which really removes a large burden on the team. When you invest in your team and the culture you have, it truly motivates them to work harder as they feel appreciated.
7. **You cannot teach passion so it's important that from the beginning**

**you recruit players for your team that are passionate foodies.** They need to be willing to drink your Kool-Aid and be team players for sure. We look for outgoing, personable people that will represent our brand in a confident and enthusiastic way. Additionally, getting the “buy-in” of your current team when hiring someone new is critical as it shows that you value their opinion and care if the new hires will potentially fit into your team.

8. **Don't get the team environment wrong here as we still establish roles and responsibilities of each team member—it's important to be clear about what expectations are.** Despite the titles and layers that the brigade has established, we want everyone, regardless of title, to be open and willing to jump in and be a team player. There should be no ambiguity here to blur the lines.
9. **One of the best ways to build a**

**strong team is to celebrate their hard work, achievements, and moments when they go above and beyond their roles.** We celebrate our team with “QSB's” or “Quite Simply the Best” shout outs. These can come from clients, managers, coworkers, and peers. Having formal recognition of their wins is an excellent way to build camaraderie on the team and makes them feel appreciated as team members. When you have a team that's rewarded for helping one another and being team players, they will work harder, smarter, and celebrate the wins of the team which will impact the success of your company.

I could go on here for days to count the ways that we celebrate our team. Fostering a positive team environment can have many positive outcomes such as reducing stress and increasing happiness, which at the end of the day is all that we want for ourselves and our team. 



**Robin Selden** is the Managing Partner & Executive Chef of **Marcia Selden Catering & Events** and **Naked Fig Catering**, where she oversees the culinary and marketing operations for her family's multimillion-dollar company, the first catering company ever inducted into the CT Restaurant Association's Hall of Fame. In October 2019, Robin was honored to be named to the BizBash1000 celebrating the top 1,000 event professionals in the USA in 2019 and to the BizBash 500 celebrating the top 500 event professionals in 2020 in the United States. With matriarch Marcia at the helm, the company orchestrates over 850 events a year. Winner of the coveted Catie Award for Caterer of the Year, MSC has been considered the “It” caterer of Connecticut for over 40 years. They also have offices in New York City and launched Naked Fig Catering in 2019; a luxury plant-based catering love child of celebrity chef Matthew Kenney and team MSC. Selden is in the President's Council as a past President of the International Caterers Association and won their Chef of the Year award. She's a past Innovative Chef of the Year and a current Ambassador Chef for the Greenwich Wine & Food Festival.



## STEAL THIS



Fresh ideas to use or adapt at your next event.

# TOP IT OFF

**They're a staple in everyone's pantry and on everyone's table: condiments.** Spices, sauces, relishes, rubs, you name it. That extra pinch of salt that brings out the flavor of a dish. The hot sauce that kicks it up a notch, or the rub that helps emphasize the juices and flavors of a fine cut of meat. For many, a dish isn't fully complete without that finishing touch, that final flourish. Many chefs and companies today have even started developing their own pantry staples to help elevate their dish from delicious to exceptional. How will you top off your next great dish with a condiment?

—Amber Kispert



**Aji Verde Base** (jalapeños, cilantro, green apple purée, and lime) | **Uses:** Fish and scallops | **Shown:** Seared Sea Scallops  
Photo courtesy Chef Vlad Brianstev

**Chef Winston's Island Jerk Seasoning** (garlic, salt, onion, allspice, black pepper, sugar, scotch bonnet, ginger, thyme, cloves, and cinnamon) | **Shown:** Jerk salmon, basted with brown butter  
Photo courtesy Chef Winston Williams



**Watermelon Salsa Borracha** (tomatoes, garlic, jalapeños, watermelon, and poblano chile liqueur) | **Shown:** Grilled skirt steak with blue corn tortillas topped with fried pieces of queso cotija, pickled tomatillo and toasted cumin seed  
Photo courtesy National Watermelon Promotion Board



**Mr Bing Chili Crisp** (crunchy garlic and onions, four types of chilies, mushroom powder, and spices) | **Uses:** Sauces, pasta, steak, chicken wings, and potatoes | **Shown:** Spicy Deviled Eggs (mayonnaise, Mr. Bing Chili Crisp, Dijon mustard, rice vinegar, white sesame seeds, toasted, scallions, chili oil)  
Photo courtesy Mr. Bing



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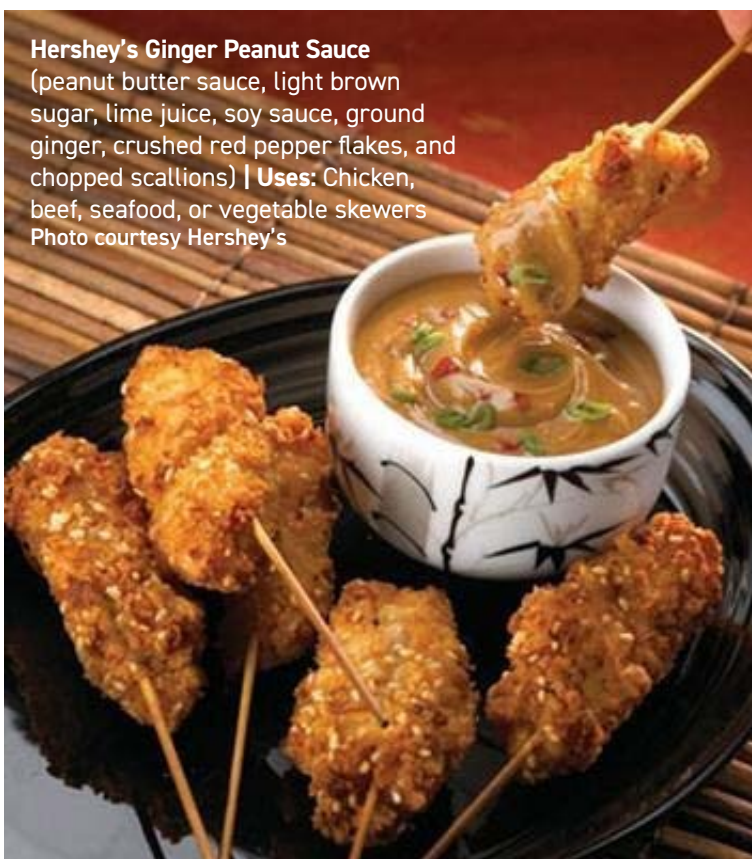
**Red Jalapeño Aioli**  
(red jalapeño puree, olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and cilantro) | **Uses:** Sandwiches, fried appetizers, crudites, and fries | **Shown:** Connecticut Lobster Roll with Red Jalapeño Aioli  
Photo courtesy D Snake



**Pressed Hard Cider Sauce** (green apple puree, draft cider, apple syrup, garlic, shallots, heavy cream, apple cider vinegar, white wine, and thyme) | **Shown:** Applewood Smoked Pork Chops with Pressed Hard Cider Sauce  
Photo courtesy the Perfect Puree for Lisa Dupar Catering



**Hot Mustard**  
(peppers, mustard, white honey, and apple vinegar) | **Shown:** High Street Corn with spicy ranch, Hot Pepper queso fresco, and...  
Photo courtesy Cura



**Hershey's Ginger Peanut Sauce** (peanut butter sauce, light brown sugar, lime juice, soy sauce, ground ginger, crushed red pepper flakes, and chopped scallions) | **Uses:** Chicken, beef, seafood, or vegetable skewers  
Photo courtesy Hershey's



**A Dab A Do Ya!** (cayenne pepper, black pepper, turmeric, garlic, and paprika) from Chef Jolie Oree-Bailey (Low Country Quisine's House Seasoning) | **Uses:** poultry, beef, seafood, vegetables, fruit, soups, sauces, pizza, and fries | **Shown:** Grilled Vegetable Napoleon (A Dab A Do Ya! marinated and grilled portabella, red onion, zucchini, squash, roasted red and green peppers, smoked tofu, with spicy coconut curry sauce). Photo courtesy Chef Jolie Oree-Bailey



**Tamari and Preserved Lemon Glaze** (tamari, lemon puree, sherry vinegar, extra virgin olive oil, agave, Dijon mustard, black pepper, and sunflower oil) | **Shown:** Roasted Maitake Mushroom with Tamari and Preserved Lemon Glaze. Photo courtesy Kikkoman



**Yondu** (fermented soybeans) | **Uses:** Combine with apple cider vinegar for an all-purpose marinade for grilling fresh vegetables. Photo courtesy Yondu

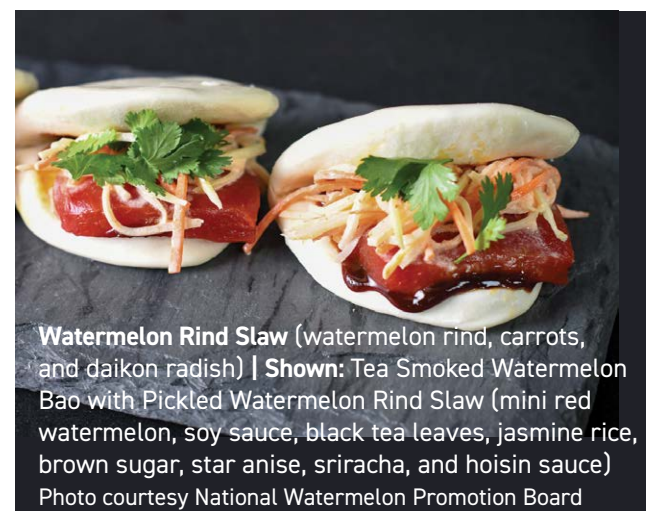


**Roasted Mango Salsa** (mangos, onions, peppers, and savory seasoning) | **Uses:** Fish tacos, grilled chicken, and other fish dishes | **Shown:** Fish Tacos. Photo courtesy National Mango Board





**Wasabi Cocktail Sauce** (ketchup, wasabi, fresh garlic, lemon juice, and zest) | **Uses:** Grilled shrimp or salmon burger | **Shown:** Grilled Shrimp  
Photo courtesy Artisan by Santa Barbara



**Watermelon Rind Slaw** (watermelon rind, carrots, and daikon radish) | **Shown:** Tea Smoked Watermelon Bao with Pickled Watermelon Rind Slaw (mini red watermelon, soy sauce, black tea leaves, jasmine rice, brown sugar, star anise, sriracha, and hoisin sauce)  
Photo courtesy National Watermelon Promotion Board



**Unagi Balsamic Syrup** (unagi sauce, balsamic glaze, and star anise) | **Shown:** Unagi Balsamic Sauce Syrup Over Wasabi Ice Cream (basil, mint, simple syrup, and wasabi powder)  
Photo courtesy Kikkoman



# AS SEEN IN SANTA BARBARA



Mango Masala Shrimp from Chef Gunnar Planter with the Mar Monte Hotel featuring squid ink, scallion, Fresno, chili, and Meyer lemon.



A Watermelon Poke Bite from Chef Manny Juan with Oliver's featuring watermelon poke marinated in yuzu and furikake on a nest of watermelon rind topped with watermelon 'caviar.'



Santa Barbara Bluefin Tuna Crudo from Chef Sergei Simonov with Loquita featuring hibiscus gel, smoked ajada, arbequino olive oil pearls, and micro radish.



Chef Brian Smith with UC Santa Barbara Residential Dining Services preparing spice roasted grapes with a ribbon of peppercorn-crusted salmon gravlax, sushi rice and garnished with kani daikon matchsticks.

**D**uring the annual International Foodservice Editorial Council gathering in Santa Barbara, Calif., conference organizers encouraged attendees to “Toast the Coast,” and boy did they ever! During the conference’s premier event, the Chef Showcase, chefs from around the city converged on the Mar Monte Hotel’s Cabrillo Pavillion to show off their culinary prowess through the likes of appetizers and plates. Here’s a look at the truly appetizing and trend-forward bites that attendees were treated to. — *Amber Kispert*

All photos courtesy Buzz Orr Multimedia



Cacahuete Pork Belly from Chef Adam with LOCAL featuring crispy cacahuete belly, endive cups, pickled shallot, micro cilantro, and crushed peanuts.





**Spiny Lobster Crispy Rice** from chefs Peter Lee and Felicia Medina with Secret Bao featuring soy sauce, Santa Barbara spiny lobster, furikake crispy rice, secret spicy sauce, chives, lemon, and local finger limes.



**Oak Smoked American Lamb Ribs** from Chef Nick Priedite with Priedite BBQ featuring fermented hot honey and lemon cucumber pickles.



Santa Barbara  
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**Salt Boiled Idaho Fingerling Potatoes** from Chef Jeremy Tummel with La Paloma featuring avocado serrano salsa, horseradish, and smoked trout roe.



**A Choripán sandwich** from Chef Juan Pedro Muñoz with the Cruisery featuring MorningStar Farms® Vegan Chorizo crumbles and homemade lime garlic aioli on a brioche roll.





By Fausto Pifferrer



## A New Way to Give Back: *The You Can Have Mine Initiative*

**The wedding industry took a beating in 2020 during the pandemic.** From coast to coast, wedding businesses were painted by the press as greedy and unwilling to understand what their clients were going through. The fact that wedding businesses were going through the same thing was never even mentioned. It bothered me that we were portrayed this way.

It also bothers me that in 2022 there are still hungry people, especially children, in America. The reports of food insecurity range anywhere from 31–49 million in America. At least 17 million of these are children who can't fend for themselves.

This led me to wonder if there was a way to counteract some of that negativity and turn it into something positive. I wondered if there was a way to connect these two things: repairing the public perception of the wedding industry and making a difference in food insecurity in America. This is where the *You Can Have Mine Initiative* was born.

This initiative is simple: divert money from a wedding budget and give it to food-insecure people in the community where the wedding is taking place.

Participating caterers inform their clients that they are a participant in the *You Can Have Mine Initiative* and how it works. The clients (or the caterer or planner) then reach out to the vendor team with one simple question: "Are you interested in skipping your vendor meal and instead interested in donating the cost to local hungry children and food insecure adults?"

I know vendor meals can be a touchy subject in our industry right now, and this gives the wedding team the option to participate or not. If a few members of the group say yes, then great! If others say no, that's okay too. No hard feelings. Once the client pays the final invoice, the caterer calculates the cost of the donated meals and sends it along to a predesignated local organization: food pantry, shelter, etc. Destination wedding clients could also choose to have the funds go to an organization in their home communities. The point is that funds from a wedding are going directly to help hungry people.

Look at the numbers: The most recent wedding we catered for had 14 vendors, and the meals were \$100 each. If all 14 of these vendors opted in, that would be \$1,400 to be donated to the *You Can Have Mine Initiative*. Imagine if just 15 caterers in each of the 52 states (that is 780 caterers!), each catering four weddings per Saturday, participate in the program. The potential would be \$908,544,00. That is almost \$910 million dollars going toward hungry people in local communities from one simple statement: "*You can have mine!*"

Let's feed some hungry people! 

*Fausto Pifferrer is the Co-Founder of Blue Elephant Events and Catering, Saco, Maine.*

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**EXCLUSIVE:** Wearable Art Gala (p 50)  
How code-switching creates industry illusions (p 44)

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WINTER 2022

## State of the Industry 2022

THE BRIDGERTON  
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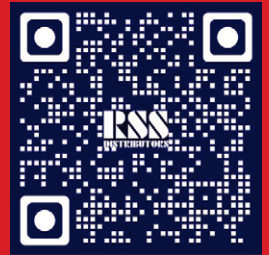
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**On the cover:** Caroline Wanga, CEO, ESSENCE, dazzles the red carpet at this year's LA Wearable Art Gala. Photo courtesy Jerritt Clark





## EDITOR'S PAGE

## EVENT MAGIC

I was thinking about Jackie Watson and Fausto Pifferrer's opinion piece "All that Glitters" (starting on page 44)—it isn't just the professionals like Fausto and Jackie who must present themselves to a client in a particular way...it's also the event itself. All that glitters is what our clients see, but they don't really get a full picture of what happens behind the scenes, do they? They aren't there when the chairs are stacked 10 high and shoved in a corner, straight from the rental company, or notice the racks of wine glasses still wrapped and nestled in their Cambros or Carlises, towering higher than any arm could reach. They don't see the grapes plummeting from a charcuterie board en route to a preset or the tape measure being deployed to ensure perfect symmetry between tables. They don't witness the executive chef tending to a sudden burn or the dirt and cuts on the florist's hands. They don't trip over orange Home Depot buckets, ladders, packing materials—we disappear that before they arrive. That's our magic. For even more on that magic, turn to page 50.

I love the event industry. There's nothing like it and the fact that many have told me that they are busier than they've ever been as we emerge from the COVID haze is gratifying. I've seen so much good this year, I have experienced and been a part of so much good, it makes my heart happy. This year has been strange and wonderful, disconcerting, and full of terrific wins. We talk about the state of our industry and what's to come beginning on page 20.

I hope you had time this season to relax and enjoy a few cheesy holiday movies, have some great food, and spend time with people you care most about.

From all of us here at *Special Events* magazine and The Special Event Show, we wish you all the best for 2023 and hope to see you in Orlando in March. Cheers!

*Kathleen*

Kathleen Stoehr  
Director of Community & Content Strategy

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# Winter 2022 THIS ISSUE

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Marketing expert  
**Christie Osborne**  
advises on privacy trends  
for the next year.



Tech expert **Elizabeth Sheils** gives a trend forecast for important operational technology.



Event business strategist **Michelle Loretta** talks upcoming economic factors in business.



UX pro and designer  
**Jordan Kentris**  
provides strategies for  
attendee experience.

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# SPECIAL EVENTS

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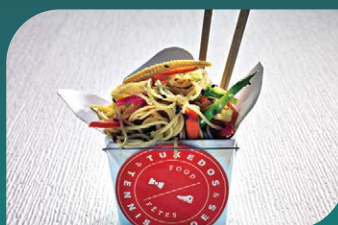
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# Conference updates

## The Industry Event of the Year: The Special Event 2023!

Quarter 1, 2023. In less than three short months, we will all be together in sunny Orlando, Florida for The Special Event! There's a lot happening that last week in March and we are here to break it all down for you and why you need to clear your calendar and book a flight—**STAT!**

### The Special Event: *It's all here!*

The Special Event continues to be the premier gathering for professionals who have built their careers in the events and catering industries. Three days of conference sessions coupled with two full days of tradeshow exhibitions, an opening and closing general session, awards ceremony,

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a leadership luncheon, and three evening events will keep attendees invigorated! All the major industry associations will be in attendance, conference sessions will allow attendees to keep their accreditations current, and “surprise and delight” installations are in the works to keep your social posts snappy. It's all here in Orlando March 27–30. Here's a look at a few details!



**Event planner  
Marcy Blum**

Photo courtesy  
The Collective You

### Opening general session speaker: Marcy Blum

An “eventista,” Marcy Blum is an expert in entertaining, etiquette, food, and wine. She has been producing creative, magical, and personal events for over 30 years, launching Marcy Blum Associates in 1986 and is frequently noted as an innovator in the events industry. Blum

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## CONFERENCE NEWS (CONTINUED)

infuses her culinary arts background with her humorous and sane approach to entertaining, to create extraordinary memories for her clients.

A graduate of the Performing Arts High School and the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, Blum produces events where the entertainment and décor are elegantly theatrical, the food is delicious and creative, the wines are thoughtfully chosen, and the service is beyond spectacular.

Blum is the author of the best-selling "Wedding Planning for Dummies" and "The Wedding Kit for Dummies". She has been named a top international event planner by VOGUE, Harper's BAZAAR, and Martha Stewart Weddings, and is named one of the country's five best planners by The New York Times. Blum has been a featured guest on *Oprah*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, *Live with Regis and Kelly* and has been

named a 'tastemaker' for Homegoods. Blum has produced the weddings of Savannah and LeBron James, Kyra Sedgwick and Kevin Bacon, Jennifer Gates and Nayel Nassar, Tamiko and George Soros, Kevin Love and Kate Bock, Rickie Fowler, Billy Joel, Katie Lee, Nate Berkus and Jeremiah Brent, and Padma Lakshmi and Salman Rushdie. Some of her event highlights include Donny Deutsch's 50th birthday, several of the original marketing events for Comedy Central, the five-story opening of Société Générale in New York, parties for Regis and Joy Philbin, and celebrations for the Rockefeller family.

The Special Event is delighted to welcome Blum to the stage to discuss her philosophy for presenting clients with unforgettable events.

**Wednesday, March 29  
9:00 a.m.**

**Keynote stage**

### Closing general session speaker: Chef Art Smith

Chef Art Smith is the executive chef and co-owner of Blue Door Kitchen & Garden in Chicago, Southern Art & Bourbon Bar in Atlanta, Art & Soul in Washington DC, Art Bird & Whiskey Bar at Grand Central Terminal in New York City, and Chef Art Smith's Homecomin' Florida Kitchen & Southern Shine Bar at Disney Springs at the Walt Disney World Resort.

Smith has received two James Beard Foundation awards, the culinary profession's highest honor, and has cooked for some of the world's most famous celebrities. In 1997, Smith became the personal, day-to-day chef to Oprah Winfrey, a position that lasted 10 years and was personal chef to Michelle Obama during her book tour. Smith now coordinates and cooks for special events all around the world. He is a frequent







**Chef Art Smith**

guest on the Food Network, the Cooking Channel, and Bravo.

Chef Smith is the founder of Common Threads, a non-profit organization teaching low-income children to cook wholesome and affordable meals since 2003. He believes that through hands-on cooking and introducing children to fresh foods we can help prevent childhood obesity, reverse the trend of poor eating habits, and learn about diversity and tolerance through the celebration of our cultural differences and our commonalities.

In 2015 Smith launched a non-profit organization, Reunion, Florida Garden and Kitchen School, in Madison, FL at the historic Wardlaw-Smith House near his childhood home in Jasper, FL. At Reunion, students of all ages receive free classes on Southern cooking traditions, horticulture, and weather forecasting via Weather Stem systems.

Smith lives in Chicago, IL and Jasper, FL with his husband, renowned artist Jesus Salgueiro. The Special Event is delighted to have Chef Smith onstage at its closing general session on Thursday morning, March 30.

**Thursday, March 30**

**9:00 a.m.**

**Keynote stage**

## The Special Event complete: We are family!

The backbone of this event, of course, is the stellar education presented each year and the exhibit hall floor offering the latest in catering and event equipment, supplies, and tastes. This year, expect over

100 classes to choose from via the TSE-only pass just in the conference area alone, Tuesday through Thursday, March 28–30. With a combined Catersource pass, you double your opportunity for learning. Want a look at the conference schedule? Go to <https://schedule.thespecialeventshow.com> and get your look. After January 06,



Exhibitors and activations abound on the exhibit hall floor at Catersource + The Special Event. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography





Ruchir Mewawala presented a session on East Indian weddings at The Special Event in 2022. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

most sessions will be scheduled into their final time/date. You can also search by track, conference, association, and accreditation.

On Wednesday and Thursday, head to the exhibit hall floor for opening and closing general sessions plus classes on the Ignite stage—and more surprises and networking opportunities along the way.

As for the exhibit hall, 2023 will tout a combined show floor, mixing The Special Event exhibitors with Catersource exhibitors for less of a “church and state” feel. After all, we are family—events and catering are hand and glove. We are a perfect fit and stronger together!

## MEETINGSNET

### Meeting planners! We have something for you!

*Special Events* magazine’s sister brand, *MeetingsNet*, focusing on meetings and incentives, now has its own track at The Special Event! Your pass to The Special Event also includes the opportunity to attend anything within the MeetingsNet track, which includes sessions on speaker contracts, event negotiations, negotiating AV services, and more.

Go to <https://schedule.thespecialeventshow.com> and click on TSE-MeetingsNet to find these specific sessions.

### Registration is open!

If you are reading this article prior to January 06, quick!, head over to <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent> and register now for the lowest prices available. After January 06, we start our Early Bird rate (still a great deal). Hotel and travel information can also be found via the navigation bar at the top of the screen. ●

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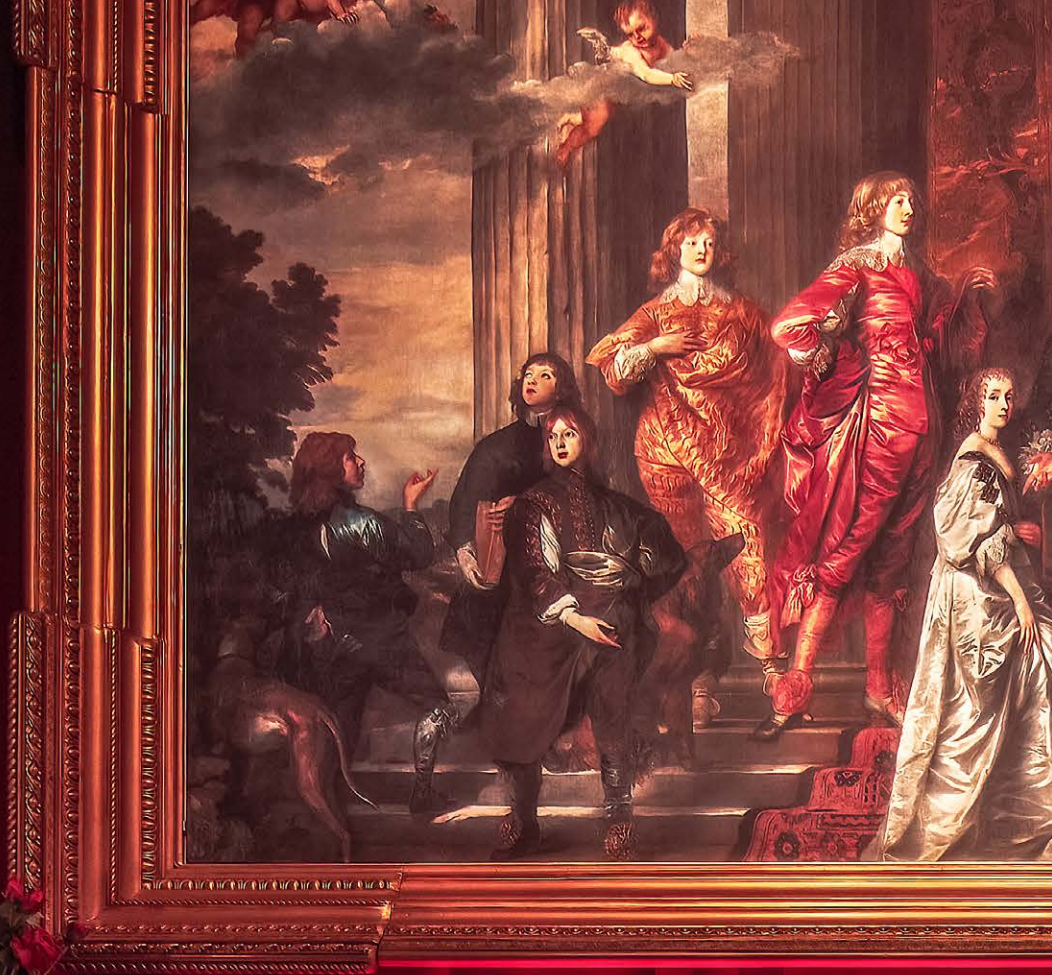
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## DIVINE DECOR



After the ball, attendees sat for a photo that was quickly edited to look like an oil painting portrait. Photo courtesy Federico Imperiale







# A Royal FAN-FIC AFFAIR

The immersive *Bridgerton* experience transported attendees into the world of their favorite Regency-era mini series

By Amanda Nicklaus

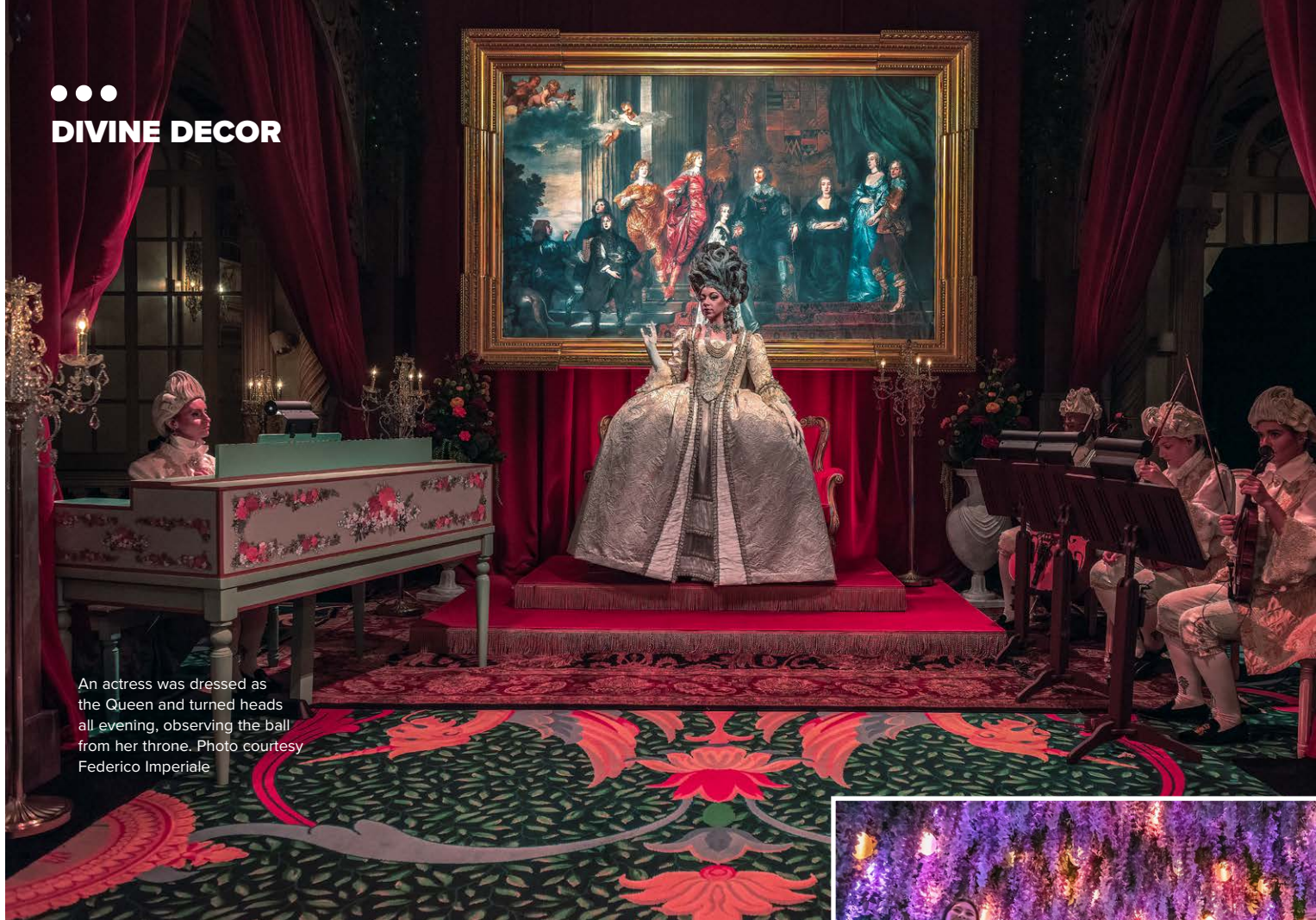
A new genre of events is emerging: immersive television show experiences, where fans can step into the worlds of their favorite characters and enjoy what it feels like to be part of the storyline. Events such as “Stranger Things: The Experience,” “Friendsfest,” “Peaky Blinders: The Rise,” and even Immersive Gamebox’s “Squid Game” have been gaining popularity, leaving enthusiasts to wonder if their own favorite show will be recreated next.

Enter “The Queen’s Ball: A *Bridgerton* Experience,” and you step into a past era of romance, puffed sleeves, etiquette, the English gentry, and a dash of scandal... all the feels that viewers of the hit Netflix show *Bridgerton* hope for.





## DIVINE DECOR



An actress was dressed as the Queen and turned heads all evening, observing the ball from her throne. Photo courtesy Federico Imperiale

*Bridgerton* (the series), for those not in the know, is a Shondaland (Shonda Rhimes) production via Netflix. "At Shondaland we are breaking the boundaries of storytelling by providing our global audiences with curated experiences that go beyond the traditional avenues of content consumption," said Sandie Bailey, Shondaland's Chief Design and Digital Media Officer in a press release about the immersive event.

### An Enchanting Evening

For those attending the experience of *Bridgerton*, immersion means donning Regency-era ballgowns and waistcoats and traveling back to the 1810s in high society London, UK, (even if, for this reviewer from *Special Events* magazine, outside the venue doors lay the city of Minneapolis, MN).

Upon entering the host gallery, one was greeted with a roomful of people

bedecked in pearls, buckled shoes, and tiaras, and the excitement was palpable as attendees waited to be shown into the ballroom.

When the clock struck seven, attendees were ushered into a ballroom through a long archway draped in glowing lights and dripping florals, each taking a moment to snap a photo. VIP members were offered a glass of champagne, and people mingled around the black-and-white checkered ballroom waiting for the festivities to start. All around, attendants in breeches and powdered wigs welcomed each group and spoke in a proper English accent, pointing at newspaper clippings attendees received on arrival and gossiping questions about the identity of Lady Whistledown, the show's resident mystery gossip columnist.

The evening grew in enchantment when "the Queen" entered the room, watching as guests tried to impress



(Above) Guests entered the ballroom through a lit-up floral archway and paused for a photoshoot. Photo courtesy Federico Imperiale

(Right) Attendees posed for a photo while a costumed royal attendant pulled up the photo on a digital easel, making it feel like each group sat for an oil painting. Photo courtesy Federico Imperiale





her with a bow or a curtsy. On stage, a string duo and a pianist played over a track of ballroom covers of pop songs, including “Sign of the Times” by Harry Styles and “Thank U, Next” by Ariana Grande. After, people swirled around the ballroom dancing, and soon, a performer hyped up the crowd. Next, a couple who had been dancing among the crowd stepped out of the shadows and performed an aerial dance using curtains that came down from the ceiling, which turned into an acrobatic show when the chandelier lowered and began slowly spinning while tricks were performed.

The ball finished with attendants splitting the crowd in two and teaching them ballroom line dances. Afterward, everyone was led into a marketplace of sorts, where they could pose for a photo that was edited to look like an oil painting, as well as purchase

costume jewelry, merchandise, and drinks from the bar. All around, the room was surrounded with set walls of architectural columns, decorative busts, bay windows, and dress shop storefronts, transporting attendees back into Regency-era London. From décor to programming to costumes, everyone stuck to the theme, and it was truly an enchanting evening at The Queen’s Ball. ●

***This event is occurring in Minneapolis, Denver, and Toronto through the end of 2022. Netflix partnered with the show’s production company, Shondaland, to create this immersive experience.***

(Right) Vendors sold costume jewelry and headpieces before the show to make sure everyone had the chance to dress for the ball. Photo courtesy Special Events Staff



Regency-costumed performers did an acrobatic dance on a spinning chandelier. Photo courtesy Federico Imperiale

(Above) Guests received a newspaper clipping of Lady Whistledown’s gossip column—a pivotal plotline of the show. Photo courtesy Special Events Staff



# Three Economic Indicators to Watch in the New Year



**By Michelle Loretta**

**One of the most** common questions I am asked currently is: are we in a recession? Technically-speaking... not yet. While shortages are driving up costs and inflation is further complicating consumer spending, the economy is not yet in a recession. As far as the events industry is concerned, it seems we are still in a period of growth.

Weddings are still experiencing *the boom*—not only from the post-pandemic demand but also because of the generational shift. Gen Y is now between the ages of 25–42, all at the age that is considered to be peak-marrying-age. Corporate events, after being shut down for two years in most parts of the US, have come back feverishly and with budgets to follow.

But what should we look at to gauge market contraction aka *a recession*? After all, economies cycle. What goes up, must come down. I'm sharing three economic indicators to watch over the next year. These will help determine how confident people are in spending and how that may inform decisions about their event budgets. Lastly, I'll share what you should be doing to prepare for anything.

## **LOOK AT: NATIONAL & REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATES**

It goes without saying that people who are employed will have income to spend and feel more secure in those spending decisions. The national unemployment rate is hovering at 3.5–4% in late 2022. Ideally, we want this to be closer to 5% indicating that

employers aren't short staffed and people can move freely between jobs. A lot of the labor pinch that we're feeling in our industry is reflected in low unemployment rates. We just can't find enough people looking for jobs and hospitality seems to be one of the hardest hit industries.

It's also important to know what's happening in your local region. Unemployment rates at 2% in San Francisco versus 8% in Detroit impacts what happens in those cities. The low employment rate in San Francisco means that hospitality employers will continue having a hard time staffing events but will have clients who feel secure in their spending. Conversely, Detroit event companies may easily find willing workers, but their clients may not feel comfortable stretching their event budgets in light of local employment instability.

## **WATCH: LOCAL HOUSING MARKET**

The Federal Reserve has raised interest rates in an attempt to slow inflation. With higher interest rates, people are less apt to take on a huge loan or mortgage. Naturally, we should see home buying rates go down along with other big purchases. Look to your local housing market to gauge confidence in spending. If people are buying homes, they're usually making other large investments.

If you begin to see your local real estate market slow down, this can be an indicator that consumers are feeling less financially confident. This almost always mirrors wedding and social event budgets particularly for middle- and

As far as the events industry is concerned, **it seems we are still in a period of growth.**



lower-income Americans. The upper-income segment, served by luxury wedding providers, tends to have less volatility in their spending though they may make different choices with how they spend their budgets.

Corporate events, conferences, and festivals may be less impacted by the housing market trends. It will largely depend on the industry of the company. Industries tied to consumer buying like retail, automobiles, and technology products will be more conservative with corporate event budgets. But many industries like healthcare, B2B technology, and education aren't impacted as deeply by consumer spending.

#### **STUDY: HOLIDAY SPENDING & CONSUMER CONFIDENCE**

Take a look back to see what holiday buying trends were for the tail-end of last year. Was holiday spending steady; or did retail stores see sharp declines? This will define how confident both consumers and corporations feel about spending on events in the current year.

The Consumer Confidence Index is a simple measure of how confident people feel about the economy now and how confident they feel about the future economy. Measured

by [The Conference Board](#), it's a strong indicator for how positive or pessimistic people feel. Because events are planned long in advance this can be a helpful indicator that can shape how confident we feel about people investing in events. If the Consumer Confidence Index begins to trail downward after several quarters, this can signal that people will be more hesitant to make large purchases, including investments into events.

#### **HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE NEXT RECESSION**

So, what do we do when we see that these economic indicators paint a less than rosy picture? First, don't panic. Market contraction is a normal cycle of the economy. But it's helpful to be prepared. It's not unusual to see company sales decline during a recession.

If you were to lose 10–20% of your income in the upcoming year, do you have sufficient cash savings to cover that decline? In other words: looking at your previous year of income, do you have 10–20% of that income in savings? If not, it's not too late to start squirreling away cash.

The 10–20% of income saved allows you to cover a possible 10–20% loss for

a year without having to make drastic budget cuts. Naturally, you will cut back on some of your expenses during a recession, but you won't be forced to do so in a panicked state. This savings gives you the luxury of time.

In general, it's great to plan for the future. But don't live in a state of fear that might hold you back. Plan for the worst and expect the best! ●

---

**Michelle Loretta** is a business consultant and financial strategist for wedding and event professionals. As founder of Sage Wedding Pros she blends her past as an accountant for Deloitte, a sales and marketing manager for DDLA, a merchandiser for Coach, and a stationery entrepreneur to strengthen wedding and event businesses worldwide. Michelle wakes up each day excited to create Financial Strategies and Cash Flow Plans for Event Businesses. She has been asked to speak at a number of industry conferences, including NACE Experience, Biz Bash Live, and The Special Event.





# SPECIAL EVENTS STATE of the INDUSTRY 2022

The hard work isn't  
over, but the future  
remains strong

By **Amanda Nicklaus**, with  
special topic contributors



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**Earlier in the third quarter, *Special Events* released a survey to our readership.** Surveys are always a good place to start an end of the year report. The pandemic changed us, to be sure. A lot of people left event work for good. Many changed careers, took early retirement, were let go—myriad reasons. Events faltered, they resurged. The economy surged in 2022... until it didn't. Many have told us that they are having a 2022 financial year that rivals pre-pandemic levels.

Let's first look at a few of the simple questions we asked, and some of the interesting responses we received, and then we will move into the guts of the beast—our annual SOI (as we call it in house): the Special Events State of the Industry 2022.

### Who responded to our survey?

59% described their company as an event or meeting planning company. 48% identified as Owner/President/Vice President or General Manager; 25% as event planner or event producer.

Interestingly, 83% noted that they have been in the events industry for over 10 years, with 27% of them more than 30 years.

### Top event types in 2022

In a “select all that apply” style question, the top event type above all was “corporate” with a resounding 77% of all companies winning some type of contract from a corporation in 2022. Other top event types were those produced for associations (53%) followed by fundraisers (44%). A mélange of social events including birthdays, anniversaries, quinceañeras, etc. ran neck-and-neck with fundraisers (also 44%). Weddings rated 39%.

The ambiguous category of “other” which included fill-ins such as festivals, board retreats, guest lectures, tradeshow, commencement ceremonies, and national holiday celebrations brought up the tail at 21%.

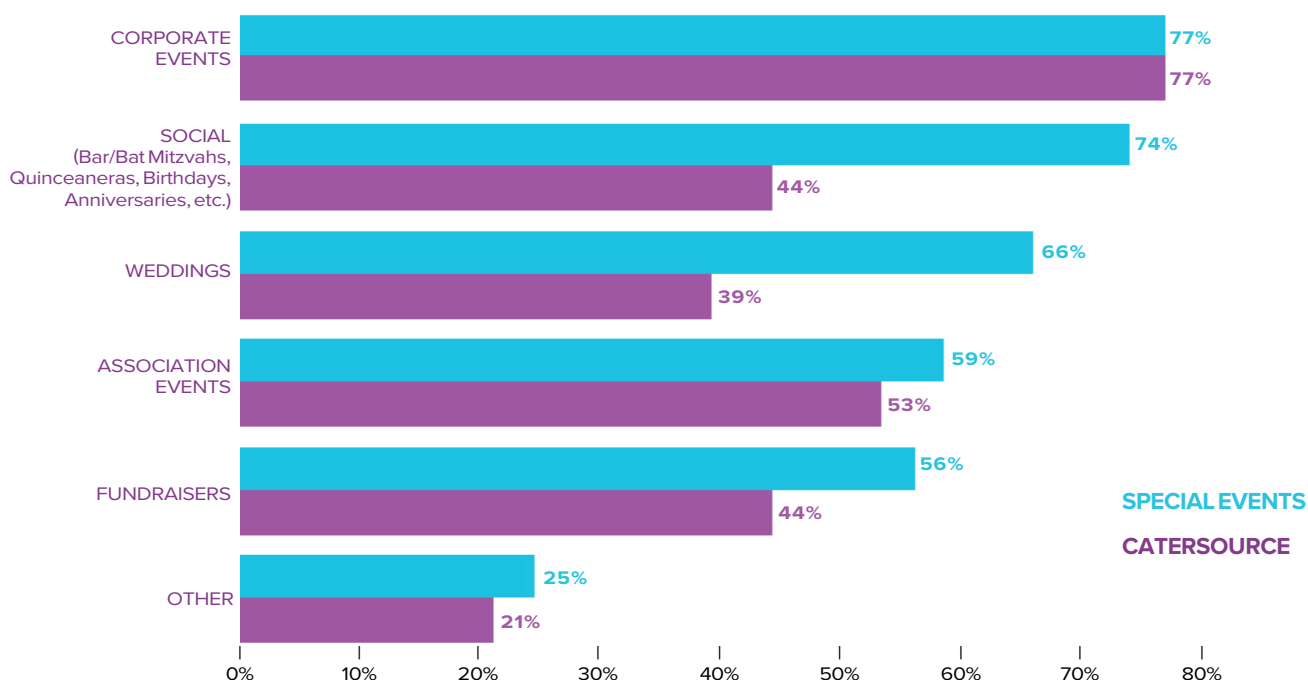
Interestingly, in catering, corporate events also trended at 77%, but social events were near neck-and-neck at 74% and weddings were higher at 66%.

### Pre- versus post-COVID event numbers

While word on the street says that many event pros are far busier than they were pre-COVID, the survey said otherwise. Pre-COVID, 45.69% selected 1–24 events as their top number contracted. In our post-COVID survey, however, 49.4% selected 1–24 events. All other areas of selection (25–49, 50–100, and 100+) saw a small percentage drop over pre-COVID numbers. Typical attendance at events holds steady at an average of 100–249 guests (35%).

Finally, we asked what types of content our readership is most interested in devouring. The biggest surprise was that staff hiring and retention was the least interesting of

Below: You Tell Us! Our reader survey shows the types of events organized by our readers (and those of our sister publication *Catersource*)





This champagne hoop skirt is one example of the interactive and engaging event service that is on the rise. Event by Catalyst Arts. Photo courtesy Show Ready

the 11 selections we offered. Whether that speaks to an industry that has rebounded well enough that it is unconcerned about hiring (doubtful) or that managers feel they have the tools they need to hire appropriately...we can speculate all day.

What you want to know more about, however, are event design ideas and trends, event technology, food and beverage trends, sales and marketing techniques, and sustainability. We'll do our best to cover all of these in upcoming months through the pages of *Special Events* magazine, via our website, and through our live content at The Special Event in March 2023. — Kathleen Stoehr, Director of Community & Content Strategy, Informa Connect

## THE IMPACT OF SHORT FORM SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEOS

**2022 has been the year of TikTok and Instagram Reels;** it certainly feels as if you can't scroll through social media without seeing a flood of short form videos, from running kittens to cute



Caterers and planners alike can find inspiration from social media, like these appetizers served in cones by LUX Catering and Events. Photo courtesy Billow and Mull Photography

babies to lip synching. And then there is our industry, using it as a way to promote our services, and ourselves. But is everyone using it, or does it just seem that way? Do we like these platforms and their content, or do we despise it, forced to acknowledge, however, that it's useful for business? Let's look at social media in 2022 and how it's shaping the way we are perceived as businesses, as well as its shifting role in the events industry.

Social media is as important as ever for marketing but gone are the days when Facebook was one of the first places consumers turned to when researching potential partners. Today Instagram and TikTok rule with their more in-your-face visual formats. Potential clients want to see the faces behind the business, their values reflected, and the services shown as close as they can get to experiencing them in real life.

Business owners can likewise use the tools and content social media offers to their advantage. Social media platforms offer marketing and advertising tools, data analytics, and direct communication with customers. Short form video demonstrates a business's ability to keep up with trends, and TikTok is the best place to learn them.

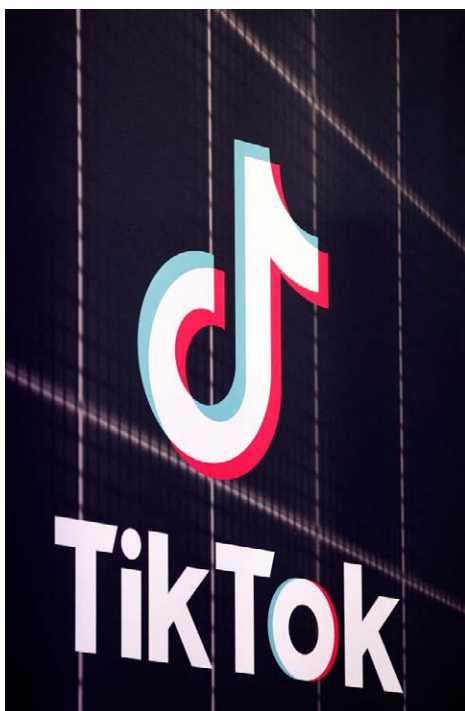
Twitter still holds value for events and conferences, since this is a convenient and hashtag-searchable way to broadcast information and updates quickly. Live tweeting and livestreaming allow event attendees and potential customers alike to stay updated with events and feel as if they're part of the experience.





Above: Event trends for 2022 are focused on innovation, like these party favors that double as a wedding seating chart. Photo courtesy Kelsey Regan Photography

Below: Many planners are utilizing the popular app TikTok to market their events and services. Photo by Chesnot/Getty Images



We at *Special Events* wanted to see what our followers have to say about short-form videos. In a recent survey, we found that 55% of respondents use TikTok, though the majority only use it about 0-1 times per week. In contrast, 82% use Instagram Reels regularly, split almost evenly between 0-1 and 2-4 times per week. Again, there's an almost even split between planners that create content themselves and those who pay a social media manager to create content. 67% of respondents said they use short form video because they think it's good for business, while 22% said they post these videos because it seems like everyone else does.

In May 2022, marketing expert Aleya Harris noted on [specialevents.com](https://www.specialevents.com) that "with more than half the world's population using social media now, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are incredible places to share your brand story and build trust with potential clients and customers. But only when you show up authentically!" —Amanda Nicklaus, Content Editor, *Special Events*

## MENTAL HEALTH OF PLANNERS

According to Charessa Sawyer, LMSW and founder of the Event Therapy

**Network**, the pandemic pulled back the curtain on the state of mental health in the industry, and what we're seeing is a desperate need for mental health resources and planners who prioritize their own wellbeing. While many wellness conversations were percolating before the pandemic, it was the pause in the industry that catapulted these topics into a new reality. With job losses and financial scares, the frailty of mental health became clear across the industry, making work-life balance and personal health a priority.

Among her clients, Sawyer sees that the stress of professional issues stems from personal problems—childhood trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, for instance. These unaddressed issues are aggravated by the perfectionism and high-stress environment of the events industry, often showing up as anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, and depression, among other issues.

Sawyer and several other industry experts discussed the topic of mental health in the events industry during a Candid Conversations panel at The Special Event 2022 (to be continued at TSE 2023). During this panel, which visibly moved attendees, speakers discussed the perfectionism, competition, isolation, imposter syndrome, and self-criticism that planners easily fall into. There were recurring themes of the importance of planners seeing each other as confidants instead of competition; of finding people to be vulnerable with and purging the industry of impossible expectations.

Between social media and professional displays of success, perfectionism has a stronghold. "Stop trying to keep up, social media will definitely have you doing back flips," says Sawyer. The collective discussion is centered on the importance of planners being honest with themselves and their clients about what they can achieve. As Terrica, owner of Cocktails and Details, said in the discussion

panel, “Planners keep telling clients, ‘You can have the wedding of your dreams.’ No, the hell you can’t!”

Many planners are now recognizing that the human need for validation is easy to find in the events industry, but internal validation is one of the keys to mental health. Sawyer says that self-awareness is the first step to making any changes. By continuing these conversations, becoming aware of the industry’s effect on mental health and learning to check in with emotions and personal traumas, event planners can begin the healing process and lead the events industry in a healthier direction. This awareness can be utilized in a moment of stress or anger by pausing and using positive self-talk to deal with an emotional obstacle, instead of perpetuating what Sawyer calls “event warfare”—the miscommunication among colleagues that leads to emotional pains and fractured business relationships.

The panel also discussed the need to celebrate personal achievements, instead of focusing on turning growth opportunities into self-criticism. There is increasing recognition that uplifting oneself and each other is important for

**By continuing these conversations, becoming aware of the industry’s effect on mental health and learning to check in with emotions and personal traumas, event planners can begin the healing process and lead the events industry in a healthier direction.**

creating a healthier feedback system and improving mental health in the industry.

Other conversations are changing the way planners think about roles in relation to other professionals. The closing keynote speaker for The Special Event 2022, chef Roy Choi, emphasized the idea of collaboration across fields; between front of house and back of house, between caterers and planners, even between planners and their team. Delegating tasks and creating a team mindset is an important step forward for decreasing stress and improving mental health.

The consensus among thought leaders is that prioritizing mental health is the only way to make the event profession a sustainable career. Making time for mental health is a personal choice, but it’s also necessary; many planners are now understanding the connection between personal and professional, leading to the creation of event therapy resources, support groups, and more awareness for setting boundaries and creating time for mental health. When doing timelines and event strategies, Sawyer says, “you have to pencil yourself in...You have to make sure every day your name is written in the calendar.”

As we slip back into “normal” pre-pandemic numbers and routines, it’s vital to be proactive against pre-pandemic mental neglect, and it’s important to keep the discussion going. With rising event numbers stacked against staffing shortages, planners are at high risk for burnout and mental illness, but by valuing their health equally or more than business, they can ensure wellness enough to keep a business thriving. As Sawyer put it, “If you don’t prioritize your health, your body will.” Taking time to care for ourselves is the key to maintaining healthy personal lives and healthy careers.

One other thing to keep in mind going forward: transparency on the topic. Honest conversations are how we can destigmatize mental illness. It’s easy for most people to admit to anxiety, because this illness has been destigmatized. Substance abuse—not so much. Alcohol and other consumable vices are easily accessible, even encouraged, at events. The best thing planners can do right now is to commit to self-awareness and to find solidarity in their community, seeing each other as confidants, not competitors. Being “open and honest,” as Sawyer put it, is the key to breaking down barriers and creating a healthier future for events. —AN

## **THREE-PRONGED SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK**

**Sustainability might have previously meant**

**“eco-friendly events,”** but the definition of this term is being further hashed out to include a more complete picture of environmentally-friendly events. Sustainability also refers to all forms of sustainable business practices, specifically environmental, social, and governance (ESG).



ESG frameworks are increasingly the center of sustainability discussions among planners. [The Event Leadership Institute \(ELI\)](#) says that “For event companies, defining ESG and DEI values is important because it also sets standards for the venues and vendors you choose to collaborate with.”

Let’s break down each category:

## Environmental

Planners are tired of simply talking about reducing waste and saving the planet. Conversations have turned toward real-world, practical ways to create environmentally sustainable events, using methods like circularity, ethical sourcing, and carbon emission offset.

A recent industry report titled [“Finding the Future Together: Towards a More Sustainable B2B Trade-Show Industry in the U.S. and Canada,”](#) revealed that the top environmental impact of tradeshow in these two countries is from greenhouse gas, with 85% of carbon emissions coming from visitor transport and 13% coming from venues themselves.

The [Net-Zero Carbon Pledge](#) is the most popular way to deal with these emissions; this initiative is a way for companies across the globe to commit to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2040, 10 years ahead of the Paris Agreement. A few events have already managed to achieve net-zero carbon emissions; a [recent report from IMEX America](#) showed that their 2021 conference offset 100% of the Las Vegas Convention Center’s carbon emissions. There is still a long way to go as event companies work to get on the same page, but with major players leading the way we are heading in the right direction.

Sustainability continues to be a priority for M&E programs in 2023. Four in five respondents (80%) say their organization

takes sustainability into account when planning meetings and events. Of those that say their organization takes sustainability into account, 76% say that their organization has a defined sustainable meeting program strategy.

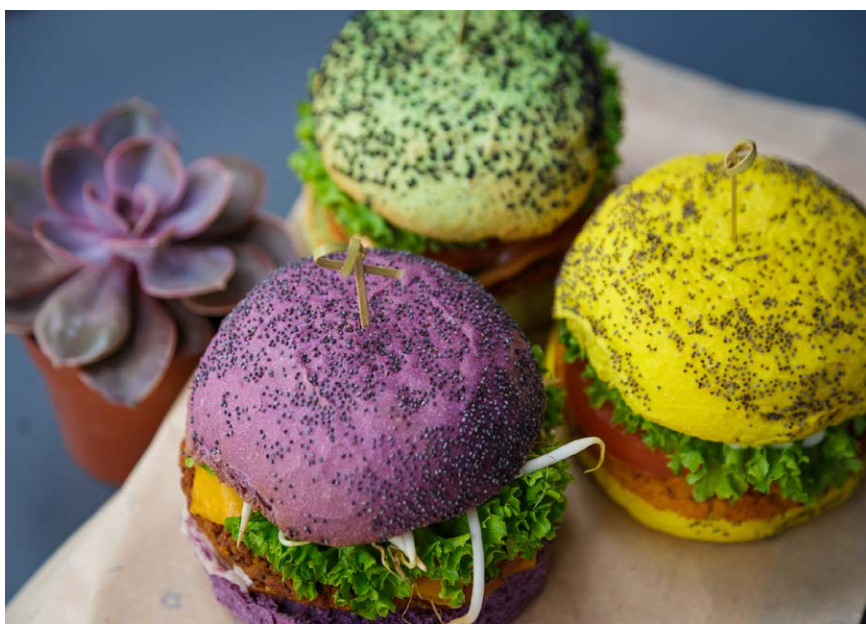
We at *Special Events* and The Special Event Show are doing our best to create sustainable events as well. “Catersource + The Special Event are committed to providing both a sustainable and inclusive environment for everyone attending our event,” says Tina Johanson, VP of Event Delivery at Informa Connect. “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 and will continue to include activities like local charitable events, onsite digital signage, translation services, and a focus on diverse and inclusive F&B options.”

## Social

The [United Nations](#) says that social sustainability is “about identifying and managing business impacts, both positive and negative, on people.” Event companies have seen a surge of DEI programs and initiatives in the past few years as a response to sociopolitical happenings. According to The American Express (AMEX) 2023 Global Meetings and Events Forecast, “Incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) into meetings and events was also a top priority for meeting professionals. Nearly nine in 10 (87%) respondents say their organization or client actively strives to incorporate DEI in 2023.”

An International Caterers Association (ICA) D&I Community Update webinar that took place this past September touched on the topic of LGBTQ+ weddings, noting that while gay weddings are slowly becoming normalized among event planners, there is a long way to go for trans, non-binary, and queer weddings.

(Below) Vegan options are popular environmentally and socially sustainable catering offerings.



The webinar also emphasized the importance of continuing to have DEI conversations so that mindfulness and understanding can keep growing across the industry.

Sensory and neurodiversity have also gained awareness with events, with efforts like [The Neu Project](#), which originated at Google, encouraging “new practical tactics of inclusion for neurodivergent communities, starting with event spaces and programming, workplaces and beyond.” Other organizations like [KultureCity](#) work with venues and planners to create sensory-safe environments. See our [fall issue](#) for more information on sensory inclusivity.



An Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework is the most comprehensive way to look at sustainability and an increasing part of sustainability conversations among planners.

### Governance

Sustainable governance means ethical long-term business practices. This includes corporate governance, codes of business conduct, and risk and crisis management. Sustainable governance looks like top-down business ethics, with event companies practicing transparency and accountability and creating appropriate power dynamics.

An article from *Forbes* titled “[Governance As The Force For Real Change In The ESG World](#)” notes that company leadership needs to be clear about goals, values, and the purpose of a business so that they can maintain best practices.

“Without putting emphasis on the governance model, a business will not be sustainable and consistent in its actions, nor will it be able to anticipate risks and successfully overcome them, even if its environmental and social strategies are well-implemented. Having a clear and robust governance model can allow companies to respond to the needs of the future, not just those of the moment.”

Sustainable governance is the key to successful environmental and social sustainability. Without it, *Forbes* says, companies “allocate more resources to fighting scandals, retaining demoralized employees, funding public relations campaigns to rebuild their brand and defending claims that result from alleged bad practices.”

In an ELI webinar “[SG + DEI in Events: What Planners Need To Consider for 2022](#),” panelist Erika White, owner



Ethical sourcing, Net Zero carbon offset, and compostable utensils are some of the ways planners are moving toward eco-sustainable events.





Luxury furniture rentals have been substantial for post-pandemic events. Design by Bellwether Events. Photo courtesy Ken Pak Photography

Bright hues and vibrant pops of color are showing up in new ways, like this bright yellow scheme. Photo courtesy Colette's Catering & Events



and principal consultant for Griffin White Consulting, LLC and Tourism Diversity Matters, talked about the importance of governance for event companies. “You don’t want there to be a disconnect between where you’re having your event and the very values that you represent as an organization.”

ESG is the key for event companies to create real, meaningful sustainability. While there is plenty of room for growth, continuing conversations and event companies taking practical steps are helping the events industry move toward the common goal. —AN

## AN OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK FOR THE EVENT RENTAL INDUSTRY

**The past three years have inundated the world with enough nerve-racking challenges to last a lifetime.** The pandemic hit all industries hard, but the event rental industry was especially impacted because most special events were canceled or postponed. On the bright side, as we are nearing the final quarter of 2022 and looking ahead, the American Rental Association (ARA) can confidently report that the event rental industry is showing all signs of a full return to pre-pandemic revenue levels with an optimistic outlook for the future. And even though there are still challenges to overcome, several exciting trends have emerged for the event industry scene.

## Bouncing back

Without a doubt, the lifting of many pandemic gathering restrictions spurred the strong comeback of the event rental industry. Rental companies are experiencing an increased amount of event inquiries compared to the past two years, with revenue levels on par with or exceeding pre-pandemic 2019. While there remains an underlying concern of future COVID variant-related shutdowns and ongoing supply chain challenges, many companies are reporting record revenue in 2022.

Statistics prove that things are looking up. ARA's 2022 Q3 Economic Impact Survey showed a high percentage of event rental companies reporting their fourth quarter in a row of improving conditions. This includes improving economic conditions compared to the prior year and consistent year-over-year revenue growth.

Additionally, in Q3 of 2022, 94% of ARA members reported the same or improving economic conditions compared to the previous quarter. Only 6% of members reported a worsening of conditions. In Q3 of 2022, optimism remained high with 81% of ARA members expecting increased revenue compared to the same quarter in the prior year.

## Covering costs

Of course, the current optimism is tempered by rising business costs. More than 50% of ARA members have taken proactive steps to counter those costs by focusing on operational efficiencies, proactive pricing reviews, and adding necessary service fees and charges.

Before the pandemic, the event rental industry took many of the services they provided for granted and did not charge—or undercharged—for them. Examples include not charging “week of” fees for last-minute or emergency orders, undercharging for delivery and installation labor, and not increasing rental product pricing at the same pace as the rest of the economy.

If the pandemic showed us anything about the special event rental industry, it's how essential it is. The public's desire to gather and celebrate once-in-a-lifetime events does not stop. But rising business costs highlighted the paramount need to charge appropriately for products and services provided.

## Overcoming current concerns

It's no surprise that labor shortages and supply chain issues are two main factors influencing event rentals.

Increased staffing levels pre-pandemic allowed event rental companies greater flexibility to address last-minute or unexpected challenges. That same luxury does not exist today with many operators struggling to return to 2019 employee levels. This has highlighted the importance and focus on effective communication between rental companies and event planners, so no detail gets overlooked potentially creating an unforeseen need for additional labor that might not be available. Of course, event planners are seeking out reliable rental companies with a proven record of accomplishment of delivering on their promises, and for good reason—their reputation depends on it.

Likewise, rental companies have gotten more selective with the orders they take, focusing on higher-profit jobs they know they can handle with less risk for costly labor issues. Rental companies are striving to make realistic promises and then exceed them. Best of all, event planners and rental companies are working and growing together via a close, trusted, mutually beneficial partnership.

While supply chain issues are improving, there are still long wait times for new equipment and many events-related products to be available. Almost 75% of ARA members are reporting moderate to extreme negative impact of supply chain issues and availability of new equipment. However, rental companies are improvising through custom-built products from local vendors, updating existing inventory to extend the products' rental life, and subrental agreements to increase capacity when needed.

Overall, despite recent challenges, the event rental industry is strong and healthy, and the ARA predicts a positive forecast for future growth. Event planners can count on rental companies as their trusted partner for all their rental needs, with each partner benefiting from the relationship and contributing to each other's success. —James Auerbach, Vice President, Event Segment, American Rental Association

## THE STATE OF EVENTS: LIVE, HYBRID, AND THE METAVERSE

**Thankfully, we are seeing a return to live events and numbers reviving to pre-pandemic levels.** It might feel as if the pandemic is behind us, but the events industry is forever changed.



## Live events

According to the AMEX Forecast, “In-person meetings, as well as the number of attendees at those meetings, will increase across the board, with 87% of meetings expected to have an in-person component.” The report also noted that “the return to in-person meetings is happening more rapidly and at a greater volume than expected; however, the numbers are expected to stabilize in 2024.”

Live events look a bit different, however. David Merrell, CEO & Creative Director of AOO Events, has noticed that attendees at in-person events want more socializing and networking opportunities. “Consider building more time into your schedule for true networking activities, whether it’s casual cocktail receptions or more guided get-to-know-you exercises,” he says.

After over a year of lockdown, restrictions, attendee limits, and virtual events, people are ready to experience events with impressive vivacity; “immersive” is the word of the year. Between high-tech LED lighting, interactive brand activations and activity stations, and efforts to break the fourth wall between guests and event programming, immersive events are popular as ever.

In-person corporate events are in demand, satisfying the social element missing from at-home work environments. Photo courtesy Rayce PR & Marketing

## A *Forbes* article titled “Live Events Bounce Back From Pandemic, And Forward Into The Immersive Future”

discusses the ways immersive events are rising to the spotlight, “bringing together filmmaking, live theater, sculpture, even architecture. One of the most successful such marriages of technology, performance and art is Lighthouse Immersive’s experiences built around the works of Vincent Van Gogh, Frida Kahlo, and Gustav Klimt.”

Even coming back into the real world, immersive events give people the chance to step into fantasy worlds: virtual companies like Netflix are creating immersive events (read about our impression of “[An Immersive Bridgerton Experience](#)” on page 14).

## Hybrid events

The *Forbes* article also notes the increase of hybrid events that



incorporate virtual components: “The definition of ‘live event’ continues to evolve as well, as new kinds of cross-platform creators fuse together music, sound, images, video, live performers, props and such technologies as projection mapping and augmented reality.” Livestreaming and webinars remain important parts of hybrid events. While everyone is longing for that in-person connection, there’s no denying the convenience of hybrid events, not to mention the benefits of money saved and reduced environmental impacts.

### Events in the Metaverse

There’s two main ways to incorporate the virtual world into events: augmented reality (AR), which superimposes digital elements into the real world through a screen, or virtual reality (VR), in which a user imposes themselves through an avatar into a totally digital simulation, which requires users to look through a headset (Meta Quest or Samsung Gear, for example).

AR is frequently used for event gamification, accessing extra resources during presentations, and even acting as a map to guide event attendees through a venue. VR is quickly evolving, and top event-specific VR platforms currently include exVo by Allseated and Meetaverse. With the technology of the Metaverse, users create an avatar and attend events and tradeshows that allow networking, education, visual presentations, and even afterparty perks like virtual entertainment and bonding activities.

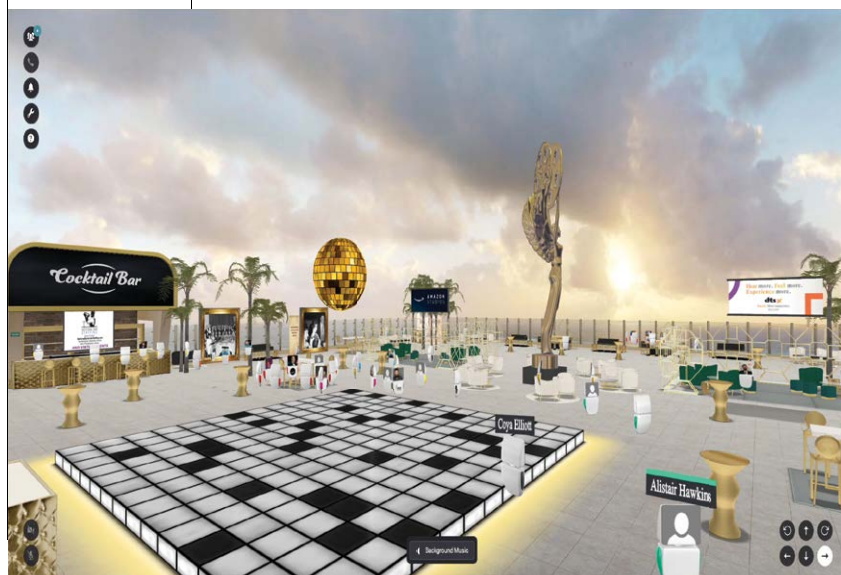
Hybrid, virtual, and VR events have numerous benefits, like unlimited attendees, increased networking opportunities, higher profit margins, more flexibility, and perks for attendees with hearing loss or language differences. While these event types are gaining popularity and seeing constant developments, economic obstacles may stifle the boom of these events: in early November, Meta announced it would be starting massive layoffs of 11,000 jobs as it converts more money

toward pursuing the Metaverse. The result is plunging stock, so the future of this event technology is one that is yet to be determined. —AN

## CHANGES IN CORPORATE EVENTS

**These are truly post-pandemic times for corporate meetings and events;** virtual fatigue is increasing the demand for in-person meetings, attendee wellness is at the front of planners’ minds, and large global events are being swapped for smaller and simpler meetings. While there are changes and challenges galore, planners are still hopeful. The AMEX Forecast reported that the mood of most meeting professionals is “positive and also overwhelmed,” with data showing that “77% of respondents are likely to be

Events in the Metaverse use platforms like exVo by Allseated to bring digital users into the same world with VR technology. Photo courtesy Allseated

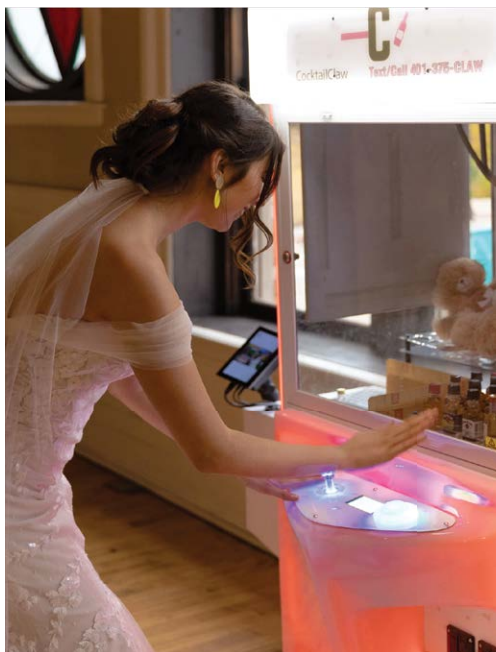






Draping florals and intriguing light fixtures have become popular décor trends this year. Design by Pearl Events. Photo courtesy Caroline's Collective

Interactive food stations, such as the Cocktail Claw Machine, engage guests with immersive experiences in high demand. Photo courtesy Cocktail Claw



optimistic (rating eight or above out of 10) about the health of the industry headed into 2023, a 6% increase compared to last year.”

Much of this overwhelm comes from the increased demand for in-person meetings. The AMEX report shows that almost half of organizations are working hybrid or fully remote, and all respondents acknowledge the need for increased in-person meetings. This number will only increase: in a presentation at IMEX this year, Senior VP of American Express Meetings & Events Gerardo Tejado noted that “over 90% of companies are already looking to work in a hybrid environment,” meaning the need for human interaction through in-person meetings will keep increasing.

Another meetings trend in a post-pandemic world? Simplifying. In the same presentation at IMEX, Linda McNairy, Vice President of American Express Meetings & Events, pointed out that one of the fastest growing meeting types is small-scale meetings. “There is overwhelming data to support what I think all of us in this industry are seeing and feeling, is an

increase in small and simple meetings... overall, the small and simple meeting category has increased by over 25% globally.”

Linda Logg, Corporate Sales Manager for Event Planning and Management at Historic Hotel Bethlehem, told *Special Events*, “The Historic Hotel Bethlehem Executive Conference Center has helped clients who previously booked one large meeting a year now book several smaller meetings. About 30% of all meeting bookings at the Historic Hotel Bethlehem Executive Conference Center this year have been from businesses specifically looking for smaller-than-usual events.”

Part of the increase in the return to in-person events is heightened commitment to attendee wellness. People are exhausted by virtual events. McNairy said that “face to face team meetings are the key to unlocking collaboration and employee wellbeing.” Safety is a major concern these days, and smaller meetings and events allow for better control over safety protocol.

Boutique experiences are also on the rise, according to Logg. “After





Mirrored and reflective aisles are in vogue, like this watery walkway at The Loft by Bridgeview. Photo courtesy @thelongislandeventista on Instagram



Food trucks and self-serve beverage trucks are becoming widespread at weddings. Photo courtesy Wildly Connected Photography

**After over a year of lockdown, restrictions, attendee limits, and virtual events, people are ready to experience events with impressive vivacity; "immersive" is the word of the year.**

long, boring lockdowns and working from home, meeting attendees are itching to try new experiences. The same old big city conferences with the same old chain restaurants just aren't as appealing as they used to be." New experiences and in-person meetings are of high value. The AMEX report reveals a unique contrast: planners are less concerned with attendee engagement at in-person events because everyone is simply happy to be together; whereas attendance and engagement is a growing issue for virtual meetings. —AN

## **NEW TAKES ON OLD TRENDS: WEDDINGS IN 2023**

**This year was a revival for weddings, and it's easy to see how the pandemic has impacted the industry.** To start, the years of waiting that couples experienced during COVID seems to have clarified what matters most to them: people are either pulling out all the stops to celebrate their big day in exuberance with multi-day over-the-top affairs and destination weddings, or scaling completely back, ditching the extravagance in favor of simplicity with micro-weddings, pop-ups, and elopements.

Either way, the wedding industry is seeing a favorable increase in spend: a [report from Rare Carat](#) says that "Americans will spend a record \$68.7 billion on weddings this year, a \$16.4 billion increase over pre-pandemic levels in 2019." The report also did a deep dive into where being in the wedding industry pays off: "New York is the best state to be in the wedding industry, followed by Washington, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Hawaii. On the other end of the spectrum, West Virginia is the worst state for the wedding industry, with Mississippi, Kentucky, Alabama, and New Mexico rounding out the bottom five."

Tim Chi, CEO of The Knot Worldwide, addressed the effect of inflation and the anticipated recession in a session at Wedding MBA 2022. He noted that couples are feeling the impact of inflation, and for 44% of couples this has already impacted their wedding planning. Research by The Knot shows that while the budget for two-thirds of couples is so far remaining flat, there are more couples reaching out to wedding pros. Catering, says Chi, is expected to take the hardest hit from adjusted wedding budgets.

In the meantime, weddings remain jubilant. Ceremony styles aren't the only thing that got rejuvenated from the pandemic pause: wedding trends are reflecting renewed creativity and a "sky's the limit" attitude. Houseplants and statement florals are in, dripping from ceilings, covering entire walls, adorning massive art pieces, styling outfits, and lining the aisles. 2023 will see some bold color schemes, as well as personalized elements of design, like custom-wrapped dance floors. Be on the lookout for mirrored aisles à la *Crazy Rich Asians*. One more thing: as we move forward, we're also





These mini perfume bottle cocktails are a trendy creative drink vessel. Drinks by Blue Elephant Events & Catering. Photo courtesy Focus Photography

Individual servings, like these mini charcuterie cones, are a trend influenced by pandemic precautions. Food by Blue Elephant Events & Catering. Photo courtesy Focus Photography



going back in time, with new takes on retro '60s and '70s styles bringing timeless looks into the spotlight.

Wedding parties and their fashions are taking creative liberties too: gone are the days of bridesmaids and groomsmen. Couples are choosing their friends of any gender to stand by their sides, and the outfits are equally expressive: mismatched wedding party clothing is on the rise. Patterned tuxes and dresses are in, and we're seeing more mini-dresses, gloves, and pearls. Sustainability is also front of mind, and many couples are investing in high-end products and accessories that can be passed down as heirlooms.

Likewise, DEI conversations continue to expand. Inclusivity has a long way to go in the wedding industry, and while it's becoming the norm to use gender-neutral terminology, we still need to be mindful of our language. For example, no need to say "gay wedding" when you can just say "wedding." Planners are continuing to learn and make weddings safe for queer, trans, non-binary, and all other individuals who don't identify as cis-heteronormative.

Finally, wedding food trends are fun and simple: the tired donut wall is getting creative redesigns, like upright

donut stacks; food and beverage trucks are gaining popularity; and midnight snacks are the latest way to wrap up the **end of the night**. Treat walls that provide individual portions of drinks and snacks are inspiring a new take on seating arrangements; instead of looking for their name and number on a simple poster, many planners are creating elaborate gift walls that give guests their seat and table number as well as a fun party favor. —AN

## NOVELTY, NOVELTY, NOVELTY: FOOD TRENDS IN 2023

**If there's one word to describe the direction of food and catering trends in 2023, it's "experience."**

Nobody wants to rush through eating; drinking and dining is a focal activity. The 2023 Food and Beverage Report from SupHerb Farms calls this "high-impact sensory experiences," telling us to "expect more extreme carbonation, beverage inclusions, colors, plating/presentation, table-side preparations, and preparation theater at foodservice."

An easy way to do that is to use outside-the-box thinking and create interesting and novel ways to present provisions.

Fausto Pifferrer of Blue Elephant Events & Catering does that by thrifting odds and ends to be used as unique serving vessels. Some of these include empty light bulbs, tea candle trays, mini martini glasses, paper cones, even mini plastic cocktail shakers, to name a few. Glass cloches are also having a moment, another simple way to creatively present servings.

Other fun trends popping up are butter boards, cocktail claw machines, and ice cream carts, all of which engage guests and present the same food and beverage items in novel ways. And you'll be seeing

more mini cocktail foods and desserts, often served in bite-sized edible vessels.

Global flavors are on the rise, including several Asian breakfast dishes. SupHerb's report also notes that spice and heat preferences are on the rise—at least among millennials and Gen X. Flavors like Nashville hot sauce, hot honey, gochujang, and tajin top the popularity charts; it seems that chili- and pepper-bases are what eaters crave.

Sustainability and inclusivity are increasingly front of mind, with upcycled food, locally sourced ingredients, and sustainable catering becoming the norm. Offering alternatives such as craft mocktails and vegan options is the new way to care for all your guests.

As THC becomes legal in more states and stigmas fade away, caterers and restaurateurs are finding innovative ways to incorporate cannabis into event menus, in the form of edible goodies and THC cocktails. (For more on cannabis event safety [read our blog](#).)

From cocktail hours to midnight snacks, food and beverages are taking up more event time. Creative presentations of individual portions—like those served on artistically decorated treat walls—are the new way to keep guests engaged and immersed in an ultramodern experience. —AN

## DMC 2023 FORECAST

**Being post-pandemic, we find ourselves focusing on the best ways to take the lessons (and growth) experienced from the past few years and use them to re-calibrate our focus on the future.** Despite talks of a recession, the DMC industry remains strong. While the pendulum of change has swung heavily, the

current pace for 2023 is in line with the high demand we have experienced in 2022.

With a growing demand for DMC support, we are seeing a shift in the needs of our clients. There is a need not only to provide critical local insight, as venues and providers re-emerge post-pandemic, but to help fill in the gaps where our clients may have previously had in-house support. With this, DMCs recognize that their teams and intellectual property are their greatest asset. There is a slow but definite shift toward supply chain purchasing and how much work a DMC will put in before requiring a financial commitment from clients. It is necessary to evaluate each opportunity and the overall effect on the company before spending critical resources. This has resulted in us not leaping at every opportunity presented but taking a strategic approach in aligning our values and strengths with an opportunity to provide a consultative service to our client partners. The need to be more selective reinforces how incredibly important long-term partnerships are in our business.

Managing client expectations remains one of our greatest opportunities. Communication, education, and clear expectations should be part of the conversation at every level. We sometimes forget that our clients live in other industries, some who have experienced significant growth in the past few years. With this, labor will continue to be a determining factor in all business, especially in hospitality. Service is its own form of currency right now and the staffing levels of the hospitality industry from 2020 are no longer the reality.

This presents an even greater need to be laser-focused on creating a workplace environment where employees want to be. This could mean taking a step toward strengthening the core of who we are: our people, by highlighting the specialized talents of our team and vendor partners, to best serve our clients. Providing opportunities for talented employees is essential to keeping them motivated and fulfilled in their careers. Employees expect to grow and develop during their tenure with a company, and the clearer the career path we can set for our employees, the more they envision a future with the organization and plan to stay long term.

The future of our industry is strong, but not without more work to be done. Driving consistency through employee retention and acquisition will be key in 2023, as our industry strives for a healthy balance of employee, vendor, and client partnerships to generate business while delivering unparalleled experiences. —*Tammy McCormick, CMP, CITP, National Director of Creative, Access*

As we head into 2023, we are aware of the challenges the industry faces. But unlike 2020—and even 2021—we know that we can survive it using creativity and flexibility, and by relying on each other. People need events, and it is the hard work of professionals like yourselves that creates that shining beacon of light as the world moves forward. ●



# Privacy, Please: How Digital Trends Will Shape Marketing in 2023



By Christie Osborne

**The new year** is a time to look ahead and forecast industry trends for the upcoming season, with fresh culinary, floral, and design concepts taking precedence. Yet, beyond the familiar perimeters of the special events community, emerging trends in other industries are positioned to affect service-based small businesses profoundly.

One such shift is seen in the increased attention to privacy regulations and how companies collect, track, and store consumer data. Many small businesses have grown accustomed to the ease of robust targeting, extensive tracking, and lenient rules surrounding data collection. After all, these features allowed for easy, low-cost marketing.

However, a heightened awareness of privacy concerns has led to an overhaul in how we treat data as lawmakers set new online standards with measures like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA).

So, what does this privacy-first revolution mean for small business owners? As we head into 2023 and beyond, expect massive changes to how we advertise, track user information, and store data—all of which may present far-reaching effects for the special events industry.

Here's a look at what will change and how you can adjust your business' marketing strategy to stay ahead of the game.

## Privacy & advertising

The first privacy laws arose in the aftermath of the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2016, as governments learned that third-party agencies could access and use data from the internet to laser-target people on Facebook (now Meta) for nefarious purposes.

However, it wasn't until Apple released iOS14 in 2021 that forced Meta to address growing privacy concerns. With the new system, Apple refused to recognize Meta Pixels on websites, effectively limiting the ability to retarget website traffic sent from Meta. Likewise, it is increasingly difficult to create reliable lookalike audiences, and Meta has eliminated hundreds of user interests, undermining the efficacy of interest targeting. All these changes mean one thing: Event professionals must adapt by creating an algorithm-proof marketing strategy. Rather than rely on the ever-changing nature of technology, go back to basics and focus on your marketing message. Messaging has the power to attract and compel people to do business with you, standing the test of time no matter how technology changes.

Specifics reign supreme when it comes to marketing messaging. Call out your ICA (Ideal Client Avatar) directly in your copy, making it clear to your audience that you're speaking to them. Then, talk about what you do differently for that particular audience. For example, if you are an adventure photographer, write your ad copy to "adventure-loving couples" and highlight

The days of touch-free data tracking and simple marketing are ending; it's time to get back to the basics of strong messaging with a people-first approach.

your wilderness safety certification or knowledge of national park regulations.

While you may not have control over targeting, rest assured that Meta's algorithm continues to work behind the scenes. As you refine your messaging and engage the right people, the algorithm will learn and deliver your ads to more qualified audiences.

**Action Task:** Revisit your marketing messaging and update ad copy to pinpoint your ideal client's wants and motivations.

## Privacy & website analytics

New privacy regulations have also impacted how we track and collect data, so business owners can expect a significant change in how they evaluate web traffic. As the global community goes in a privacy-first direction, Google announced the end of universal analytics in July 2023 as they transition from Google Analytics to GA4.

It's important to note that GA4 is not an upgraded version of Google Analytics but rather an entirely different platform. Unfortunately, you will not be able to transfer current analytics data to the new GA4 platform. When July rolls around, the current system will stop collecting data, and in December 2023, everything will be erased. If you don't download and back it up now, you will lose all your historical website data.

To get ahead of the curve, start using GA4 right away—the sooner, the better. It doesn't collect as much data out of the box, so it will require more setup. However, you can learn about GA4 to DIY your setup or hire an expert before July 2023.

Either way, it's better to set it up now and collect some data (even if you're not

using it) than risk losing data at the last minute. Website analytics can inform better marketing decisions, so you don't want to lose valuable insights!

**Action Task:** Download and back up your Google Analytics data. Then, create your GA4 account and start using it immediately—even if you plan to continue using Google Analytics until July 2023.

## Privacy & data tracking

From email opt-ins to CRMs, many small businesses capture information about people before they even become clients. In the past, it was easy enough to overlook privacy guidelines and track data in the easiest way possible. Going forward, this laissez-faire approach won't cut it. Instead, small businesses must pay greater attention to data consent, collection, storage, and protection standards.

Every business owner should familiarize themselves with the regulations on data tracking, but here are a few essential rules to get started:

- It should be as easy to opt out of data collection as it is to opt in. Don't hide the 'x' on your pop-ups and make it simple to restrict cookies. Transparency is key.
- Ensure your website has a privacy policy reviewed and approved by a certified lawyer in your state.
- Confirm knowledge of where user data is stored and how to erase it. You must be prepared to remove data from your database if requested.
- Review privacy policies and guidelines for third-party platforms, like CRMs, email marketing systems, and invoicing software. Determine your

rights and obligations if a user makes a complaint or request for data erasure.

- Develop a company policy for third-party data breaches. For example, how will you address the situation if your CRM database is hacked?

**Action Task:** Work through the list above to prepare for data-related inquiries. Read up on new regulations and stay informed about industry developments.

Many changes are on the horizon; unfortunately, small business owners will face new challenges as they navigate the new digital landscape with privacy at the forefront. The days of touch-free data tracking and simple marketing are ending; it's time to get back to the basics of strong messaging with a people-first approach. As privacy trends evolve and mature, they will undoubtedly influence all small businesses, so get a head start and address these matters before facing issues with data violations. ●

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





ON TREND

# Eye Catching Rental Trends for 2023

BY JAMES AUERBACH

After nearly three years of built-up demand—and as people get more comfortable gathering post-pandemic—the events industry is seeing a return to higher headcounts at events. Here are the latest trends we’re seeing as we head into the new year.

## Set the tone with tent style

**Tents remain a popular rental item.** Higher-end tents such as sailcloth are an increasingly sought-after choice. And while sailcloth tents were once more exclusive and harder to access, these days, there is more availability as rental companies have added to their inventory to accommodate demand. People are also gravitating toward larger tents to give guests more of a fresh air feeling.

Sailcloth tents feature sweeping visual lines, high peaks, and timber-style posts and create a softer,

more sophisticated look compared to the straight lines and sharp angles of other frame tents.

The semi-translucent fabric of a sailcloth tent is optimal for dramatic interior lighting options at night. Event professionals can use sailcloth tents to create an elegant, translucent glow through the fabric for a “fairytale” look.

If used during the day, a sailcloth tent allows natural daylight in, but unlike a clear top tent, will still provide shade for guests.

**Editor’s Note:** Find out more about how to incorporate tents in our [fall issue](#).







Sailcloth tents look elegant while creating an open event space. Photo courtesy Karena Dixon Photography





Above: Upscale flooring brings the drama and formality of being inside to an outdoor setting. Photo courtesy JAG Studios

## Upgrading outdoor events with flooring

### Outdoor tents are also seeing an upgrade in flooring.

Historically, artificial turf, or nothing at all, was the norm. Now, guests are stepping foot on everything from actual hardwood flooring to luxury vinyl plank, or a variety of plush, colorful carpeting.

Upscale flooring brings the drama and formality of being inside at an outside setting. A planner can use this to sell the vision of luxury and high-end design inside the tent with the bonus of an open-air environment and 360-degree views when looking outward (if using an open-air tent without sidewalls or window sidewalls). It brings together the best of both venue options.

## Upping the WOW factor

In addition, people are upping the wow factor of their events, and luxury is the name of the game. For instance, while farmhouse style and linen-less table options remain

popular, rental companies are seeing increased requests for designer linens and custom textile choices.

Linens add impact through color, texture, and pattern. This allows the other key components like floral, glassware, and flatware to add depth and dimension, completing the overall look.



Soft seating configurations or lounge seating areas are regularly seen around bars and during cocktail hours. Photo courtesy Ken Pak Photography



Event planners can use linens to achieve the theme or desired mood. Popular combinations include monochromatic neutrals with a pop of color or combining textures, such as sheer linens with a velvet runner.

Planners can also use linens to convert a space. A modern industrial venue can be transformed through table sizes and linen selection to create a warm and welcoming environment.

## Stylish seating **comfort**

**Distinctive soft seating arrangements are also soaring in popularity.** The events industry is reporting an increase in unique, colorful, functional, and stylish furniture for weddings, galas, corporate events, and meetings. The days of boring seating options are in the past. It's all about variety, easy elegance, comfort, and the introduction of splashes of color.

Soft seating configurations or lounge seating areas are regularly seen around bars and during cocktail hours. What was once only high-top and standard-height cocktail tables with traditional chairs has been replaced by a mix of seating options, styles, heights, and comfort materials.

Bolder colors that correspond to the event theme are on trend for social settings, while traditional black and brown leather seating options remain staples for corporate events.



Custom textiles are trending while simple farmhouse tablescapes stay popular. Photo courtesy Annie Eyring Photo



Extravagant LED chandeliers in tents have increased in popularity. Photo courtesy Caroline's Collective



Modern luxury comfort furniture is popular for wedding seating. Photo courtesy Hellen Co. Photos

## Let there be **light**

**And speaking of color, a wide variety of lighting options has become more accessible at events as the use of low voltage, energy efficient, and affordable LED lights** have become more prevalent across the rental industry. With almost infinite color combinations and the ability to change the entire theme of the room with one click of a button, LED accent lighting fixtures are in high demand. More extravagant LED chandeliers in tents have also increased in popularity.

Event planners should work closely with a professional AV rental company to incorporate lighting that compliments the theme and colors used for the event. Lighting can be bold and completely change an event space. At the same time, lighting can also be used in a subtle way to enhance a certain décor feature or moment during the event.

The use of lighting isn't only limited to evening events. Daytime events can feature wash lighting and spot lighting in targeted areas to create highlight areas of interest, traffic flow lines, and movement.





A posh bar façade set with bright floral arrangements creates an elegant and inviting bar.  
 Photo courtesy Peerless Events and Tents  
 Venue: @lotthalltx  
 Photography & Styling: @joshplusdana  
 Planning & Design: @kellydoonanevents  
 Stationary & Pattern Design: @halfmoonlettering  
 Floral: @mibellarosa  
 Rentals: @peerlesseventsandtents



Colors, textures, and patterns add impact to any tablescape.  
 Photo courtesy Peerless Events and Tents  
 Florist: @abundantfloralstudio  
 Photography: @cortniedeephphotography  
 Venue: @venueonvineyardhill  
 Planning & Design: @wheatandhoneyevents  
 Rentals: @peerlesseventsandtents

## Choosing a façade

**Handsome and stylish bar and stage facades are a growing trend.** Several styles and configurations add a unique and prestigious flair to any event. Popular options include textured front panels that incorporate intricate designs or traditional wainscoting styles. Event planners can use these facades to turn what historically has not been a focal point of an event into a unique component of the overall décor.

## Pop of color

**People hosting events are infusing accents of their favorite shades in their linens, furniture, bar and stage facades, flooring, and more.** Gorgeous hues and vibrant pops of color are showing up in new ways. Greater variety

and rental availability of these items offer more options and opportunities to be creative. Lush darker tones, monochromatic and neutrals combined with a playful pop of vibrant color are all popular choices. ●



**James Auerbach** (VP of Event Segment & Rental Industry Workforce Development at the American Rental Association (ARA)) has spent 25 years serving in executive roles in special event rental, event production, and within the hospitality industry. He understands the ins and outs

of special event rentals for large- and small-scale events. Auerbach's experience and leadership have given him unique insight into the event rental process. He applies this knowledge by leading member engagement and strategic program development for the event rental segment of ARA membership.



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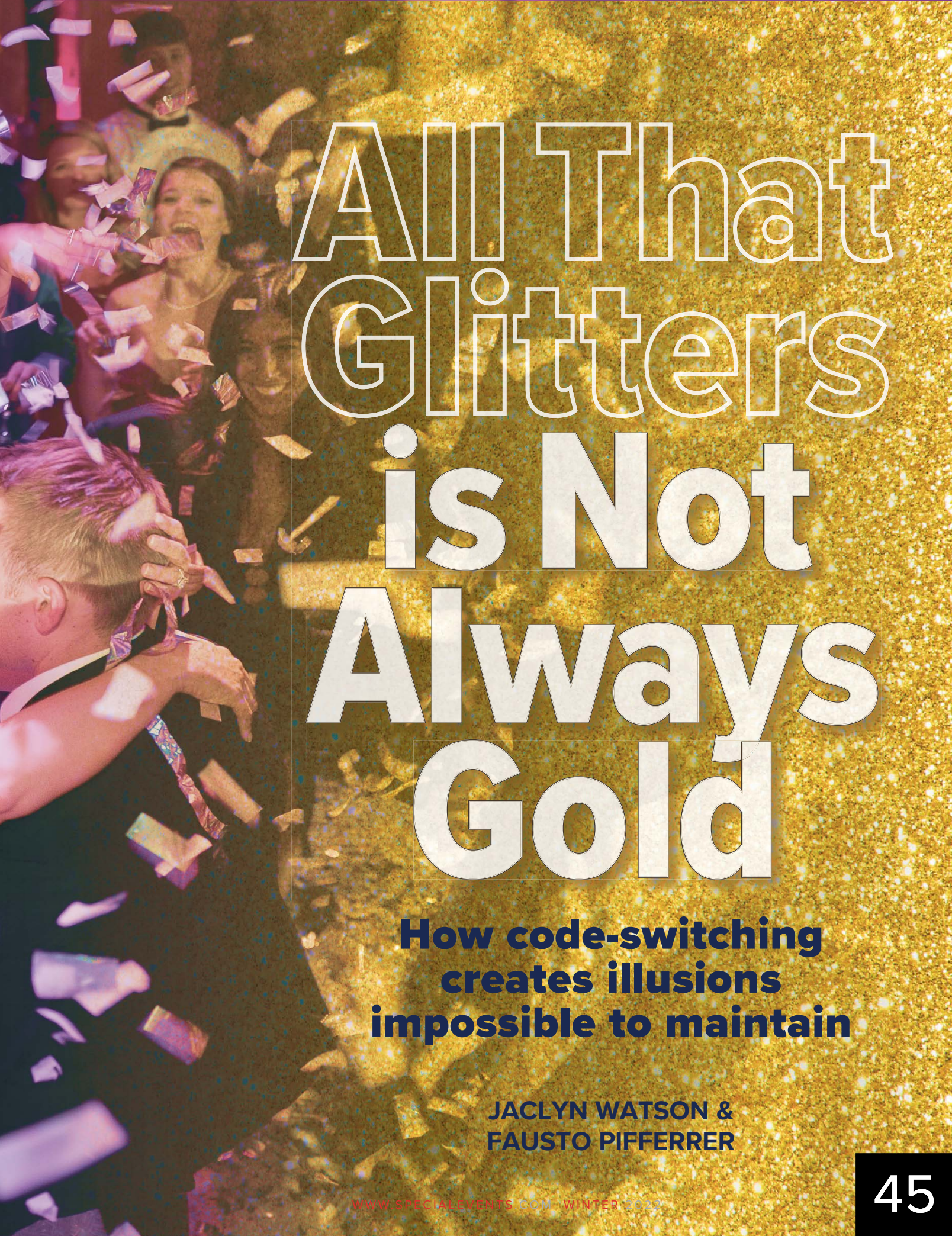
OR  
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Nothing says magic like  
confetti! Photo courtesy Nadra  
Photography





# All That Glitters is Not Always Gold

**How code-switching  
creates illusions  
impossible to maintain**

JACLYN WATSON &  
FAUSTO PIFFERRER



**Flip through any Pinterest board, any high-end bridal publication, any Instagram Reel and it's there:** over the top, gorgeous, sumptuous weddings. The gowns, the tuxes, the shoes, the five carat diamond rings. Floral arches and bouquets. The ceremonies on yachts, the farewell carriage rides, the incredible banquets.

**It's no myth:** what the wedding industry sells is glamour. Many people will never experience a day of over-the-top indulgence quite like their wedding day ever again.

Below: Different colors and textures make a pleasing tablescape. Photo courtesy JAG Studios

But behind the scenes, for the creative and gifted artists working in the industry, it is a different story; an illusion of glitter and gold that must be created in order to win jobs. It's called code-switching, or more colloquially, "keeping up with the Joneses."

## Code-Switching with Clients

Code-switching means "the modifying of one's speech, behavior, appearance, etc. to adapt to different sociocultural norms." For many of us, the art of code-switching is one of the very first things we learn. It is the psychological act of making people around us feel comfortable; as well as making ourselves feel confident around others. It makes others perceive that we are in their social circle when we truly may or may not be. Code-switching is a tool many of us have grown up using due to social and financial status. It allows us to be comfortable speaking to the wealthy, middle class, and less fortunate, while staying comfortable in our own place.

As artists, we want our clients to trust us and to feel they can relate to us, allowing the creative process to soar. After all, this is a service industry, and we love making people happy! However, code-switching often leaves a public misconception that we are like our clients regarding financial ability. If a planner wears designer labels, drives expensive cars, or displays other signs of wealth, it's easy to assume that they



have endless amounts of money to work with, creating the illusion, too, that wedding planning is a lucrative field. [Editor's note: in an October 2022 Wedding Industry Job Report by [Rare Carat](#), the average planner salary in Maine is \$56,110 where Fausto Pifferrer resides, and \$49,250 in Vermont, Jaclyn Watson's home state.]

## Code-Switching in the Industry

**Code-switching** happens not only with clients but also peer-to-peer. When first entering the industry and attending conferences, it's easy to feel intimidated by the clothes, designer accessories, and shoes, and how other



Left: No detail goes unnoticed to the experienced eye of a wedding planner. Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co.



Above: It takes a team to make an event successful, with much work invisible to the public eye. Photo courtesy JAG Studios

professionals speak and act. Many of us still feel that way even as established professionals. In our industry, newcomers and experts alike can be intimidated and often fearful that they can't compete. The reality is we all started at the bottom and climbed our way up. While looking the part may impart the appearance of financial success, the truth is that many of us in the wedding industry still struggle. There are plenty of ways to look the part that don't necessarily come from an abundant profit margin, like driving nice cars and using clothing rentals such as Rent the Runway. Surviving and thriving in the wedding industry takes tremendous hard work and investment—which includes spending money to advertise and grow the business. A part of that advertisement, so to speak, is our professional appearance. Dressing the part implies that we live and operate like our clients and the wedding professionals we admire, but this is all part of code-switching to create an ideal image.

None of this is anything to be ashamed of. However, it does offer a reality check. Master wedding planner Preston Bailey once talked about how easy it is to spend money and fall into clients' lifestyles. There are many stories of planners trying to keep up with their wealthy clients, giving the impression that they live this lavish lifestyle but ultimately can't keep up; in some instances, bankrupting themselves





Above: A dining area lavished in candles and flowers creates a divine scene. Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co.

Below: Planners must dress the part of a successful and stylish professional. Here, Jaclyn Watson prepares for an event. Photo courtesy JAG Studios



and not even being able to pay their vendors. We must remember that we aren't living the lives of our clients. Sometimes we compete with our clients or fellow pros, but we can't forget that we are hired to do a job and need to save for the future.

## The Pandemic Reality Check

The circumstances created by the pandemic have made space to discuss how we keep our businesses running. The reality is employees are often paid more than business owners. Business owners easily mismanage money, and many have gone bankrupt trying to keep their businesses viable. When the pandemic hit, the entire wedding industry was crushed, and for the first time, we were all put on a level playing field. Those who had been in the industry for decades were suddenly equal to those who had just started. Some closed their doors permanently,

others stayed afloat but still may have had to close their doors two years later. Others were savvy enough to thrive and bank enough income to keep going and not be affected. We all felt the sting of stagnant cash flow and no work to support us. We felt the stress of not knowing what was to come.

One of the biggest lessons that we all learned during the pandemic was how to be frugal. At any moment, the industry could fall apart. It is so important to remember we are not competing with our clients financially. We are also not competing with our industry peers financially, as we all have differences. COVID lifted the veil on our industry, showing that we were all equal—from the most experienced well-to-do professional to the newest of newbies.

A great example of an established company that had to get creative to survive, Blue Elephant Events & Catering partnered with several venues that provided bar service to their clients during the pandemic.



The simplest touches can elevate any element of an event, like these melon wedge garnishes. Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co.



A simple color scheme elevated with textures and layers makes a lovely table. Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co.

**“Behind the scenes, for the creative and gifted artists working in the industry, it is a different story; an illusion of glitter and gold that must be created in order to win jobs.”**

They created set menus that allowed the venues to include catering along with their venue and bar packages. This change removed sales tax, commissions, and sales reps from Blue Elephant's equation—the venue absorbed everything. This system generated easy revenue for all and provided an easy one-stop shopping experience for their shared clients. They did the hard work and focused on their own survival instead of comparing their business to peers, which would have limited their creativity and ability to bring in real income. Thinking outside the box during the pandemic and in our present day is so important, and it will help you along the way should we ever experience something like this again.

## **Staying Authentic and Creative**

Creativity and authenticity are important parts of the wedding and events industries, yet it can be difficult to discern what is authentic and what is illusion—both in person and online. Code-switching is doubly perpetuated by social media and its ability to present truth and falsity simultaneously. Social media has forever changed the landscape of our industry and shows off all the glitter and gold, often without explanation and with a veil covering the truth. It has created a world where everything is instantaneous. Clients want to reinvent what they see on Instagram or Pinterest, which takes some of the creativity out of the job. The reality is that social media presents the best versions of events, conferences, and businesses, and behind the scenes, the industry is made up of dedicated, hard-working professionals. It's important to remember that this is not a part-time job or a hobby! You need to decide whether your business is in or out. This industry requires sacrificing family life, summer weekends, and your social life to a great extent. It is not for the faint of heart. You'll have to set boundaries to preserve your sanity. Many will succeed while others fail. It is up to you to decide whether you want this as a fulfilling career or a hobby.

All this to say, there are rewarding parts of the job—we get to use our creativity and artistry to bring people together in celebration and making memories. Understanding how code-switching works and knowing where the source of the glitter and gold comes from will help you to succeed. It is essential to create your own identity and let it shine, and most importantly, to be yourself in an industry where artistic freedom is valued. ●



# CONFETTI *Beats*



Lori Harvey



Adrienne  
Warren



Beyonce Knowles-Carter and  
Shawn Jay-Z Carter



# ...and the BEAST

**LA's Wearable Art Gala** makes stunning  
return celebrating *Harlem Nights*

by Kathleen Stoehr

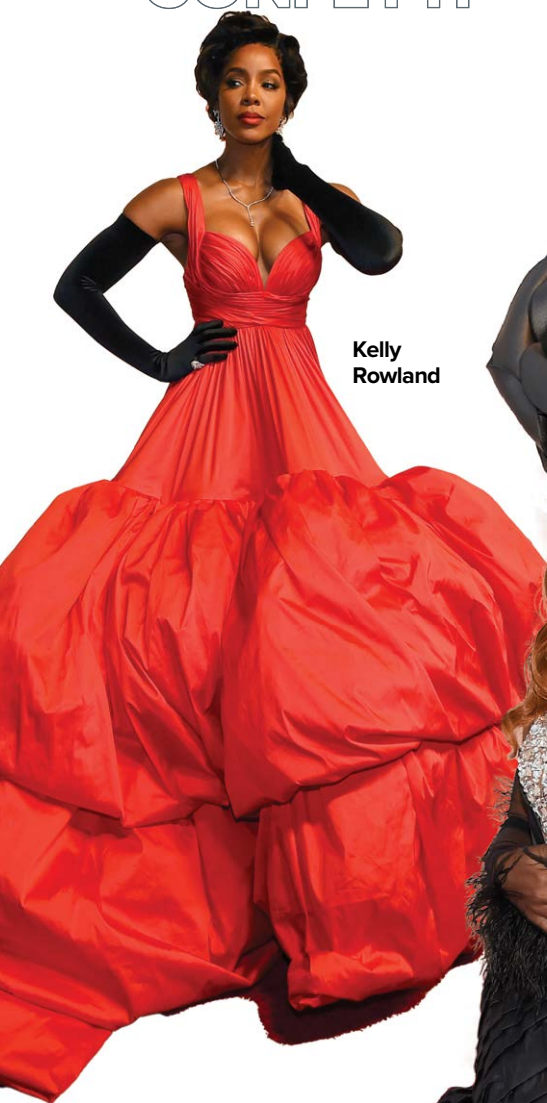
Unless noted, photos by Frank Micelotta/  
PictureGroup for WACO

Courtney B.  
Vance

Issa Rae

Angela Bassett





Kelly Rowland



Marsai Martin

*It is evolving into the Met Gala of the West Coast, with its exquisite finery and costuming, star-studded attendance, and charitable backbone. The Wearable Art Gala, now in its fifth year, benefitting WACO (Where Art Can Occur) Theater Center in Los Angeles (raising resources to support artistic and youth programs) descended upon Barker Hangar in Santa Monica with a theme, Harlem Nights, celebrating the fashions of the 1950s and an aim to reclaim the artistic legacy of our ancestors. After two years away (COVID, of course), it was truly an October night to remember.*

With music, dancing, savory culinary dishes and signature jazz club, art auction, step and repeat, outstanding musical performances and artistic tributes, the event was breathtaking. I'm certain you'll find inspiration for your next event from the next few pages of photographs.

"I have always had this dream to bring the energy, tastes, and so much of Harlem in the 1920s to '50s to our gala," shared Tina Knowles-Lawson, event chair. "From the fashion and the food to the art, cars, and supper clubs—on this night, people will be taken back in time to experience and be inspired by it all...today—in 2022."

But after all the beautiful photos, stick around for a few more: my tribute to all the hard-working individuals who made it happen. This is what I was alluding to in my editor's note. We event pros, caterers, electricians, florists, and more—we do the tricky behind-the-scenes work. We wave the wand, then the guests show up and have a terrific time, never necessarily seeing the magic we do.

I was at that event for two days helping with set up. It was a challenging event—for reasons, perhaps, that I can't necessarily put into print.

Among other things, I facilitated finding a tech who could run last minute electricity to a catering station, barged into Andra Day's green room like a boss mom in search of 150 missing cheese board knives (she's wonderful, of course—she even helped me look), took a turn at a catering station handing out sliders to celebrities, had a few laughs with well-appointed gents on security detail, set chairs, cleared tables, hauled garbage, and struck the set.

There's more, of course, but first Beauty...and then the Beast. Or maybe it should be Beauty...and then more Beauty. I'll leave it to you to decide.



# The Entrance

As guests first arrived, a lengthy red carpet step-and-repeat captured the star appeal and stunning attire of the many guests at this charitable gathering. Does this page spread look like something straight out of *Vogue*, *Essence*, *WWD*, or *Ebony*? Take these costumes straight to your Pinterest board and save them for event inspo.





# Apps, *Art & Media*

Celebrities and guests next walked through a small but well-appointed fine art gallery exhibiting pieces to be auctioned (both via live and silent), and then through a media gallery featuring a film seeking funding, *Black Terror*, plus an activation by Meta. A variety of passed appetizers gave guests a taste of what was to greet them in the next space.



Musical instruments crafted from coiled wire could be found in the media area. Photo courtesy Carol Leffler



After the step and repeat, guests walked through a gallery of silent and live auction pieces. Photo courtesy Special Events



Guests could listen to film and video presentations as they strolled through the media tent enroute to dinner. Photo courtesy Special Events



# Harlem Renaissance

***It was the era of the Cotton Club, the Savoy Ballroom, the Apollo Theater:*** exemplar establishments where powerful music, dazzling clothing, and memorable art manifested during the 1920s. At the Barker Hangar, WACO Theater Center partnered with EBONY to help recreate the vibe of this iconic era for the “dinner, dancing, and drinks” aspect of the evening—and it was accomplished magnificently via Stompin at the Savoy Supper Club.

Singers replicating legends of the past took the stage while dancers from the DADA (Debbie Allen Dance Academy) tapped and entertained guests. Six catering stations led by Chef D's Original Catering (Los Angeles) featured small plates and drink pairings to keep the crowd sated. A mix of seating from banquets and plush sofas to small café tables allowed guests to eat and rest comfortably, a portrait area captured the moment, and a New Orleans-style Second Line led guests into the ballroom for the main program.



urnee  
mollett



# CONFETTI



Cigar and cigarette ladies are actually distributing delicious chocolates from a gala sponsor.







(Above) High stomping tap floor show from the Debbie Allen Dance Academy.



(Left) As Freda Payne performs the songs of Ella Fitzgerald on the Savoy stage (far back), guests mingle throughout and enjoy food and beverage from the various stations along the outskirts of the room.



# The Main Event

As guests entered the ballroom and took to their tables, they were greeted by beautifully appointed 10 tops, each place set with a small charcuterie and cheese board, event program, and auction paddle, plus a selection of wine and champagne. Tables at the front were reserved for event chairs and their guests, certain tables were purchased in toto, and others were left to the whim of guests—all designated by colored wristlets guests had received upon check in. It was a fairly smooth system for the 650 in attendance to tackle, with little confusion. I handled about three “where do I sit?” questions in the area I was monitoring (of about 150 guests).

The event, hosted by Keke Palmer, honored actress Angela Bassett and artist Mark Bradford, included a special performance by Andra Day, offered a fundraising art auction with auctioneer Star Jones which included works by April Bey, Hebru Brantley, Samuel Levi Jones, and others, and a musical tribute to end the evening was performed by sisters Chloe and Halle Bailey.

And as always, the event ran over, the crowd slowly made its way to the exits, and the event crew made haste to clear the entirety of the ballroom in a severely compressed timespan to make its midnight deadline.



A seating chart reveals color coding for chairs, sponsors, and individual tickets. Look closely and you might be able to pick out where certain celebrities parked their tushes. Photo courtesy Carol Leffler



Halle Bailey and Chloe Bailey performed “Count on Me” in front of a backdrop of Angela Bassett screen clips.





A mainstage performance by Andra Day opened the event. She was accompanied by South Texas Symphony with conductor Marcus Norris.



Students of the WACO theater assembled onstage to thank artistic directors Tina Knowles-Lawson and Richard Lawson.



Tables toward the front of the room received charcuterie and cheese boards under domes from caterer Carla Johnson. Photo courtesy Luv OverBOARD



Emmy Award winning actress, singer, songwriter, and producer Keke Palmer served as Gala host.



## The Beast

As mentioned earlier, none of the beauty could occur without the beast—all the hard work that the many, many event professionals and entertainers, the caterers and the servers, put into the pre-show right up until the very moment of guest arrival.



(Above) Outside, lamb chops were grilled by Chef D's Original Catering; (Right) inside, they were beautifully plated along with a lobster tail and corn muffin and served to hungry guests. Photos courtesy Special Events





(Left) Hundreds of pieces of stemware needed to be unpacked and sorted, as it had come from the vendor mismatched; (Right) Voila! Placed perfectly on each table. (Left photo courtesy Carol Leffler; Right photo courtesy Special Events)



(Left) Florals were assembled in a small tented area outside the venue by LA Premier Florals & Events; and then (right) placed on each table the day of the event. (Left photo courtesy Carol Leffler; Right photo courtesy Special Events)



# CONFETTI







(Far left) The day before the event, DADA dancers practiced their steps so that (right) they could thrill the guests on Saturday night. (Left photo courtesy Carol Leffler; Right photo courtesy Frank Micelotta/ PictureGroup for WACO)



(Far left) A runway is built and covered so that (right) co-founders and co-artistic directors Tina Knowles-Lawson and Richard Lawson could walk out into the audience in style to welcome their guests. (Left photo courtesy Special Events; Right photo courtesy Frank Micelotta/ PictureGroup for WACO)





Roy Porter (left) watches as his team pulls racks off the reefer truck. Photo courtesy Special Events



Heading carefully into the hangar so as to not jostle the boards. Photo courtesy Special Events



Rolling into the ballroom. Photo courtesy Special Events

## *A Moveable Feast*

**Question:** In an airplane hangar with no refrigeration, how does one safely store 650 assembled charcuterie boards until it's time to set them?

**Question two:** beyond refrigeration, how might you stack them and keep them from being smashed or squashed? Finally, what would be the most efficient way to transport them into a ballroom with an event happening just steps away? These are the kinds of questions that keep catering mastermind Roy Porter of Engage Works problem solving until the best possible solution can be determined. Here are your answers!

**Answer to question 1:** A reefer truck parked outside the hangar, of course. Easy enough.

**Answer to question 2:** Roy contacted a local bakery for stackable bun racks. Each rack held eight finished boards. Racks were stacked and wheeled to the truck, loaded onto the lift and rolled into the cool interior until it was time to place them onto tables.

**Answer to question 3:** While guests were stomping at the Savoy in the next room over, a cadre of servers met at the truck, lowered the racks carefully, rolled them over taped down electrical wiring, up ramps, down hallways, through parted curtains, and into the ballroom. Captains directed servers, split into task groups. Some placed trays, some placed orchid garnishes, some pulled hummus wraps. Success! ●





Chef Carla Johnson checks a table in the foreground while captains gesture for more boards in the background. Photo courtesy Luv OverBOARD



### *Event Tip:* Wear an eye-catching hat

It looks silly, but it's certainly an attention grabber. Best of all, when you are looking across a semi-lit ballroom during set up you can find the person in charge quickly. In a sea of bare heads and ball caps, Event consultant Roy Porter could be spotted in a New York minute. Genius.

Photo courtesy Special Events





## FOOD FOR FÊTES

(Below) Cups of hot chocolate from Bill Hansen Catering. Photo courtesy Klara Asvenik on Unsplash





Hollow chocolate bombs melt away when warm sauce is poured over to reveal sweets inside. Chocolate bomb by Best Impressions Caterers. *Photo courtesy Best Impressions Caterers*

# A Fountain of *Goodness*

BY AMANDA NICKLAUS

**Fountains, sculptures, and other ways to make chocolate the star of your next event**

**If chocolate grew on trees, the world would undoubtedly be a sweeter place. Well, it sort of does—chocolate is made from cacao, the plant of the *Theobroma* tree, which is Latin for “food of the gods.” This also happens to be exactly how we would describe this heavenly treat.**

Bittersweet and rich, chocolate has evoked mystery and emotion since its discovery; used in sacred ceremonies, exchanged as gestures of romance, and featured across holidays, this food has been the center of fascination across the globe for centuries. Writer Margaret Visser described chocolate as a food larger than life: “Dark foods like coffee, chocolate, truffles are often associated with things like excitement and luxury. These dark and strange substances must be very old and full of meaning.”





(Above) **Chocolate Feuilletine Entremet:** Three degrees of chocolate coupled with hazelnut flavors burst forth in this intense dessert designed for the chocolate purist, from Best Impressions Caterers, Charlotte, NC. *Photo courtesy Catersource*

Besides luxury and significance, chocolate is also simply one of the most popular comfort foods and tasty joys of life. It also increases serotonin, making this mood-booster an excellent item to include at any event. Increase significance and happiness at your next occasion by featuring chocolate in all its glorious forms.

### Menu: savory, sweet, and sipped

**Everyone expects chocolate** as a dessert, so instead, surprise guests with savory! Think chocolate-based marinades and sauces such as mole, chilis, and stews, dips like hummus and baba ghanoush, and even chocolate pasta.

Of course, classic chocolate desserts will never go out of style, and amping up the presentation will keep timeless treats new and exciting.

Chocolate-dipped fruits and pastries are a simple way to add chocolate to a menu. *Photo courtesy California Table Grape Association*



Bring chocolate to the bar with spiked hot chocolate and creative takes on classic cocktails, like a chocolate mint julep or a chocolate old fashioned. Serve chocolate wine or rich chocolate stouts and porters. Garnish drinks with shavings, curls, and even small bars of chocolate, or serve beverages in chocolate-and-sugar-rimmed cocktail glasses—or for extra flair, serve them out of shot glasses made from chocolate!

Chocolate pairing menus are another luscious way for guests to experience the many iterations of this sweet. Cheeses, wines, beers, and other liquors all pair wonderfully with chocolate.



## Fondue, anyone?

**A popular event** feature, fondue fountains can be an excellent addition to a soiree when done correctly. “Chocolate fountains require a lot of attention and discipline on our end in order to be enjoyed by our guests in a clean, safe way,” says Bryce Cherven, Executive Pastry Chef at Footers Catering. The best way to do this is to use a professional catering service who provides the equipment, attendants, and service.

“There should always be an attendant whose job is to help build skewers, bus any waste, and encourage guests to only dip once with each skewer,” says Cherven. “Two attendants are even better as one can help any children through the process; we don’t have to worry about the adults *quite* as much. We have found that just by having someone at the station to both help and monitor, it cuts down on a lot of double dipping or, even worse, finger dipping.”

Make sure to place a sign nearby reminding guests not to double-dip, as well as a waste basket to encourage throwing skewers after a single use. Attendants can also help with staving off chocolate splatters, says Cherven; they can wipe down the area regularly and make sure linens don’t get ruined.

The fountains Footers uses can be rented for \$150–\$250 depending on the size, but larger fountains can range from \$300–\$500.





## Thoughtful tips for chocolatey affairs

Chocolate is best enjoyed at 65-68° F (18-20° C). Consider the temperature of the venue space and how rooms may heat up when filled with people—if you have lots of chocolate on display, be vigilant about keeping a cool temperature to prevent melting.

You'll also want to be very proactive in letting guests know about the chocolate and accompanying goodies, so guests with food allergies like dairy, nuts, and yes, even chocolate, know about the abundance of these ingredients in advance. Be sure to have allergy-friendly options.

As always, work with your caterer to try to find ethically-sourced chocolate, marked with approval from Fair Trade or [Rainforest Alliance](#) and locally made, if possible. The chocolate industry isn't immune to the problems of irresponsible farming and human labor exploitation, so make your best effort to provide ethically-sourced chocolate. Use this resource from [Ethical Consumer](#) for help in choosing chocolate companies that have a good sourcing rating.

With a little bit of caution and a whole lot of creativity, you can give guests a delicious time by making chocolate the star of your next show!



Using the molds guests filled, a chef creates a chocolate bar while they watch. "Bean to Bar" station by Lisa Dupar Catering. Photo courtesy Saskia Potter Photography

(Below) Guests can follow instructions for choosing add-ins and dark or milk chocolate at the custom chocolate bar station by Lisa Dupar Catering. Photo courtesy of Matthew Land Photography





## Eye candy

**Who says chocolate** is only for eating? In many forms, it is just as pretty as it is tasty. Take the life-like showpieces of expert chocolatier **Amaury Guichon**, whose masterpieces have gone viral on the internet for their breathtaking artistic qualities.

Some of these showpieces can be interactive, featuring moving parts or acting as a photo op. Guichon also creates chocolate illusions, crafting desserts that look savory, like a burger or taco, but are actually made of chocolate and other sweet flavorings. Surprising desserts are a great way to thrill your guests.

Another way to decorate with chocolate: fill glass bowls or candle holders with chocolate chips or cacao beans and set tea lights on top. Sprinkle cocoa powder across a table or serving station to create a beachy look.

## Engage guests with chocolate activities

**Don't just bring** in chocolate for your guests to observe or consume—make it part of the event's activities! There are plenty of creative ways for eventgoers to interact with chocolate.

Lisa Dupar Catering (Seattle, WA) offers an interactive chocolate building "Bean to Bar" station, where guests can select flavors of chocolate and add-ins such as nuts, fruits, and candies to go into a personalized chocolate bar which they get to take home.

Other interactive station ideas: make a s'mores bar where guests can roast their marshmallows over a central heat source and build their own campfire creations. Have a chocolate tasting bar



(Above left) A chocolate sculpture on display during the 2019 Las Vegas Food & Wine Festival at SLS Las Vegas Hotel. *Photo credit Bryan Steffy/Getty Images for Barcelona Enterprises* (Bottom left) Gold dusted chocolate Oscar statues are displayed during the 91st Academy Awards Governors Ball press preview. *Photo credit Kevork Djiansejian/Getty Images*



## FOOD FOR FÊTES

where guests can take notes on different types of chocolate.

For the audience that likes to learn, go above and beyond! Take guests on a tour of a chocolate factory or help them develop their skills in a chocolate-making masterclass.

Use chocolate to help support the greater theme of your event: give

guests hollow chocolate treats, like a chocolate treasure chest, which they can break into to find candies or paper fortunes, scavenger hunt clues, inspirational quotes, or other memorabilia for the event.

Perhaps the most unique activity to offer is that of chocolate massages. These massages use cocoa oil or even

chocolate wax on the skin during a massage and can lower stress, reduce cellulite, and improve circulation. Who wouldn't want to combine two of the best comforts into one relaxing activity?

### Chocolate & a show

**Want to combine** chocolate and entertainment? Bring in a live sculptor! Paul Joachim, who goes by the name **The Chocolate Genius**, is a chocolatier who creates chocolate sculptures live at events.

"Everyone has a deep, visceral connection with chocolate. Chocolate is simply a fantastic medium to connect with a vast audience!" Joachim says. "When guests see me creating a magnificent sculpture out of their favorite food group and doing it live...well, what is there not to get inspired by! On top of that, we add a chocolate-tasting component allowing the experience to resonate with all the audience's senses, imagination, and excitement." While sculpting, he'll host chocolate trivia that culminates in giving out exciting, high-end culinary prizes to the guests.

The Chocolate Genius has created sculptures of buildings, brand logos, new products, and guests of honor. Sculptures can take anywhere from 45 minutes to multiple days, depending on the event. Even without the entertainment factors, guests are enthralled by the live sculpting.

"The first thing guests experience is the aroma in the air before even seeing what I'm sculpting. They are already enthralled and looking for the source of the enticing chocolate aroma," Joachim says. Everyone stays entertained watching the piece take form over the course of the event. "Guests keep coming back to witness significant progress."

After the event, the fate of the sculpture has two options: "Many times, they are put on display where they are admired for years," says Joachim. "And, of course, the sculptures can always be eaten!"



Expert planner Michael Cerbelli poses with his chocolate replica, crafted by The Chocolate Genius during Michael Cerbelli's The Hot List™ at The Special Event 2017. Photo courtesy Artistic Talent Group



The Chocolate Genius with his logo creation for the celebration of the Orlando Magic's 25th anniversary, which he sculpted live during one of their games. Photo courtesy Artistic Talent Group



(Above left) Chocolate massage.

(Middle left) Get creative with the way you display chocolate, like this chocolate bark hanging from a small, overturned file cabinet. *Display by Pinch Food Design. Photo courtesy Pinch Food Design*

(Bottom left) Small touches of chocolate, like chocolate candles, incense, and even soap, give off rich aromas and make a memorable impression. Photo courtesy ING Image



## Tokens of affection

**Give the gift** of chocolate before and after your event! Customized chocolate bars or hot cocoa bags make great invitations and will get invitees excited about the event. You could even send invitations inside of a box assortment or with an artisan chocolate piece like rocks and jewels or marbled chocolate.

There are endless ways to incorporate chocolate into party favors. Create a “couples’ favorite” chocolate assortment for weddings; engrave logos and initials, have chocolate that’s been photo-impressed with the host’s face or a brand logo, custom wrap boxes or individual chocolates with the theme of the event or with dried pressed flowers. Customized hot chocolate favors with cocoa powder and marshmallows are always a great choice and can be packaged in a test tube, a packet, or a decorated bag. A chocolate-dipped spoon with candies and sprinkles which guests can stir into their favorite hot beverage always makes an excellent party favor.

Use chocolate as a token of remembrance for the host as well: have guests sign individual chocolate bars or a bottle of chocolate wine in place of a guestbook or have them each bring their favorite type of chocolate to contribute to an assortment for the host gift.

Whether you incorporate a few chocolate details or go all out with chocolate at every corner, your event is sure to leave a lasting and flavorful impression on attendees. ●





# Event Business Tech in 2023: A Trend Forecast for Industry Pros



While operational tech may not seem as flashy as its celebratory counterparts, **it's vital to give your backend the attention it deserves.**

By Elizabeth Sheils

## As technology continues

to transform the industry, event professionals everywhere have familiarized themselves with new day-of enhancements like video mapping, virtual reality, and innovative photo booths. Yet, with the focus on experiential tech, digital business solutions often get lost in the mix.

While operational tech may not seem as flashy as its celebratory counterparts, it's vital to give your backend the attention it deserves. After all, a strong business foundation allows you to show up for your clients with poise and professionalism.

So what's on the horizon for 2023? Here are five tech trends to optimize your business in the new year.

## AN ONGOING APPRECIATION FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

While in-person events are (thankfully) back on the scene, virtual consultations continue to support a smooth and comfortable client experience. Apps like Zoom and CloudHQ offer easy scheduling and allow you to hold meetings from a distance, which is particularly helpful for busy professionals and destination clients who are planning from a distance. Don't downgrade your video-calling app of choice just yet!

## A MOVE TOWARD DIGITAL ONBOARDING

Digital onboarding tools go hand-in-hand with virtual consultations,

providing clients with a seamless, touch-free experience from inquiry to booking. Companies with e-signatures report shorter turnaround times, increased productivity, and up to 80% more conversions. In 2023, industry-specific platforms that provide contracts, invoices, and e-signing features will continue to innovate new ways to streamline onboarding workflows for event professionals.

## AN INCREASED FOCUS ON SECURITY

As the threat of cyberattacks increases, online security should be top of mind for business owners in 2023. Keeping your digital environment safe doesn't just protect your internal data; it also safeguards your clients' personal details, including addresses, credit card information, and other sensitive information. Here are two great places to start:

- Keep your logins safe with a password manager like 1Password or LastPass.
- Start using a secure cloud storage system to back up your data confidentially. Backblaze is a great option!

## A FRESH TAKE ON COMMUNICATION

Successful businesses rely on effective communication, both with one's team and clients. While emails certainly have their place, expectations have shifted toward shorter-form messages.



Consider trying apps like Slack and Voxer to skip the extra-long emails! Loom is also an excellent option to record videos and embed a personal touch into your communication with team members and clients.

#### **A NEW APPRECIATION OF DATA**

In an industry that runs on aesthetics, it's time to lean into the quantitative side of your business. From advertising results to social media messaging, you can gather a wealth of information from your data! Set up Google Analytics (or hire an expert to do so) and review your numbers regularly. Look to your social media metrics as well, cross-comparing the results of your marketing efforts to determine the best ways to attract and engage your ideal clients.

The future is bright for event businesses, as technology helps to pave the way for enhanced client experiences, streamlined backends, and effective marketing strategies.

Implementing new tech requires time and effort, so start small and build from there. Aim to adopt one or two of these trends in 2023—like upping your cybersecurity or digitizing your onboarding process—and be patient as you and your team transition to a more optimized digital workspace. After that, the rest will come naturally!

**Elizabeth Sheils** is the co-founder of [Rock Paper Coin](#), the first software platform to bring together wedding planners, couples, and vendors into one system for managing and paying contracts and invoices. Elizabeth is also a lead wedding planner with award-winning firm [Bridal Bliss](#), where she manages the Seattle team. In addition to recognition by *Special Events* in its Top 25 Event Pros to Watch series, she also earned a spot in *The BizBash 500* for 2021. ●





Striving for innovation has driven immense satisfaction in my business because it is ever evolving—and gives me opportunities to try new things.

**Editor's note:** Jordan Kentris will be presenting "Key Strategies to Reach Today's Couples on any Device" at The Special Event in March 2023. See a description of the session [here](#).

# Finding Innovation in the New Year

By Jordan Kentris

**Innovation is born** from a solid foundation of inspiration. A core belief for me when seeking inspiration is consumption—exploring a city for its architecture and design scene, watching a film or TV with high production values, or putting on the latest album of a favorite musician. Being transported to another realm (so to speak) and immersing oneself in an environment or setting that creates possibilities for the viewer always inspires me.

I am a firm believer in finding and building partnerships with vendors inside and outside our industry. I appreciate attending trade shows and conferences, reading industry and specialty publications, and getting an inside scoop of how a business operates with their systems—these all share what people are currently doing and what capability is available to draw from. With this information you can start to make educated decisions and recommendations to your clients to “push the envelope” so to speak.

As a stationer and designer, I look at what is appearing in advertising, how digital experiences are influencing my clients’ and prospects’ lives, and how global brands are positioning themselves in a very saturated market. I source materials globally so that I have a leading edge compared to some of my local vendors who may source from the big distributors. Doing so gives me a strong talking point with clients about why I’m different. It also gives me opportunities to find new and exciting ideas, and materials and print methods that aren’t currently being showcased in an event.

Innovation for 2023 doesn’t only have to be big grand shifts in your work methods and outputs. Innovation can

be incremental improvements or subtle shifts in order to edge out what your network is currently producing. It can help you set trends in an area you can excel in, finding those pockets that no one else is specializing in.

To spot areas for innovation, I look at two things. One: where am I stuck or in need of support in my processes—this can be outgrowing a tool or service I am using, identifying that I need a tool in the first place, or even just getting bored of the same work over and over again. From here, I start an extensive research phase: talking with vendor friends, my network, google search(es) and seeking out content that can answer my needs and pain points.

The other method to spark innovation is to take the inspirations I have found and start to integrate that into my proposals, putting intention out in the universe and drawing that work toward me. Winning work and ideas that push me past my comfort zone can cause radical shifts because I may find solutions to problems I didn’t even know I had! Discovery and play are huge parts of innovation because those happy accidents are often what can push a good concept into an amazing one.

I have found that if I try to force innovation, it doesn’t always land for myself or my clients. It is sparked based on insight, challenges, and being thrown off course from my end goal with that project. Be open and receptive to feedback to keep adapting and evolving the project.

To me, striving for innovation has driven immense satisfaction in my business because it is ever evolving—and gives me opportunities to try new things. ●

# LCA LEADING CATERERS OF AMERICA

**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.

## Planning something special?

Let the best of the best in all things events be your guide.



### Corporate

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

*Photo Credit: Catering Creations*



### Weddings

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

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

*Photo Credit: Bonura Hospitality Group*



### Social

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

*Photo Credit: Catering by Michael's*



### Nonprofits

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

*Photo Credit: G Catering*

## Elite talent. Unbeatable service. Right where you need it.

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Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Wisconsin

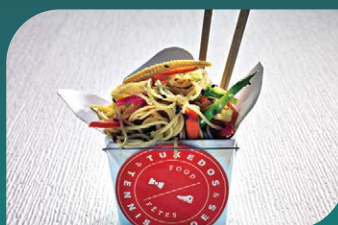
*Photo Credit: Zilli Hospitality Group*



### SOUTH

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

*Photo Credit: Rosemary's Catering*



### WEST

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

*Photo Credit: DSquared Hospitality Company*



### EAST

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, DC, Ontario

*Photo Credit: The Classic Catering People*

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



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