



Anyone who has ever attended a wedding can predict how the typical reception will go when it comes to food. There's a cocktail hour with passed hors d'oeuvres followed by a sit-down dinner with the same main course choices you had at the last wedding.

But today's bride and groom are tossing the typical dishes in favor of a customizable food style that reflects who they are as a couple, from espresso and infused-water stations to sushi bars to BLTs, and plenty of delicious treats in between.

"The bride knows what she wants before she gets to us," says Sheila Haile, director of marketing for Bohlsen Restaurant Group, which owns Prime and the Harbor Club at Prime in Huntington, among other properties. "She's done a lot of research ahead of time and knows what details reflect her personality. They like to customize their experience for an expression of their individual taste."

Whether they're working with in-house facilities or off-premise caterers, when it comes to food, couples are more interested in quality than quantity, says Andrea Correale, president of Elegant Affairs Caterers in Glen Cove.

"Brides in general are looking to shake it up so their wedding doesn't look like every other wedding," she says.

*Shake up desserts with cotton candy tasters.*

*Classy, but healthy hors d'oeuvres can transform the wedding reception experience.*

*Photo credits: Elegant Affairs Catering*

# out with *the* chafing dishes

Couples put their stamp on catered weddings, from tiny bites to "action" stations

By Liza N. Burby





*Signature drinks like these tequila minis at Harbor Club are a hit for couples. Photo credit: DejaVu Photography*

*Craft beer on tap like this display at Old Bethpage Village Restoration allows a couple to add a more personal touch by choosing a local brew or a favorite. Photo credit: The Dover Group*

A growing preference is focusing on healthy choices. “They’re asking for plant-based and vegan menu options,” Correale says. “They don’t want a lot of the high-carb and fried food stations.”

Skinny drinks that are gluten-free and low-carb are also in style, according to Butch Yamali, owner of the Dover Group in Freeport, which has four facilities on Long Island.

#### ENTERTAINING EDIBLES

Couples also want more enhancements, including “action stations,” says Vicki Colacicco, marketing manager for the Watermill in Smithtown. These include a bacon bar where a chef fires up the meat, after-party doughnut walls and hot pretzels.

At Bourne Mansion in Oakdale, a Lessing’s Hospitality Group property, couples are foregoing chafing dishes in favor of having a chef prepare pulled pork and dim sum in front of guests, says Miriam Aronson, director of mansion sales.

At the Watermill, enhancements include a craft beer station, ravioli bar, an ice cream Sunday bar and a “drive-in to go” with



offerings from local fast food chains.

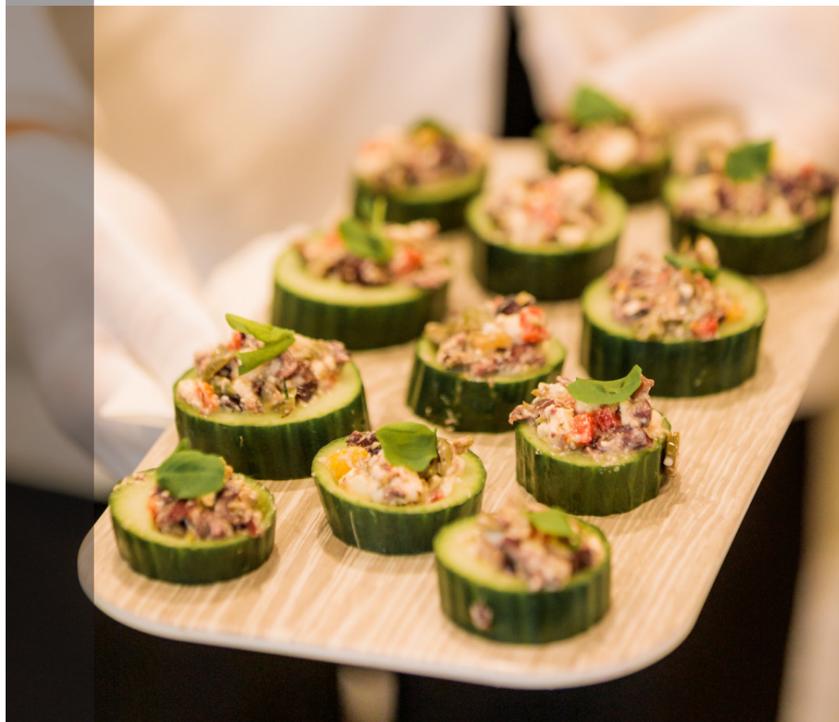
Haile says that eclectic foods are also popular, like a candy bar cart on exit so guests can fill a penny candy bag, custom cocktails, individual-sized beverages of whatever the couple likes, or a taco bar. “It’s all about whatever will put their stamp on their day.”

Yamali says another trend is the rolling cocktail hour. “There’s a variety of food served all night long, so you don’t get stuck at one table and can mingle with everyone,” he says. “It continues



Left: Couples want more variety, so what's trending are experiential stations like this bacon bar at the Watermill in Smithtown. Photo credit: ADA

Below, left: Butler-passed chef's selected hors d'oeuvres add elegance to the cocktail hour at Bourne Mansion. Photo credit: Bourne Mansion



through dessert with items like cake pops.”

Miniature foods are also fashionable, according to Aronson.

“It’s all about whimsical pops of surprises, like passing little asiago grilled cheeses on the dance floor and little cones with sorbet or bruschetta,” Aronson says.

Presentation plays a key role, she notes, with choices “like short ribs on a tasting spoon on top of mashed potatoes, mini lobster rolls, mini quesadillas.” For dessert, she says, “There are tiny cheesecake martinis, chocolate mousse shooters and apple crisps with a dollop of whipped cream — everything served in tiny receptacles.” *LIL*

*Liza N. Burby is a journalist and author based in Northport.*

## ADVICE From the Pros on How to Budget

First, look for a caterer who knows what’s on-trend and how to put the experience together, Correale says, adding, “It’s always a good idea to do a tasting menu to get an idea of the taste as well as the visual presentation.”

All these food options come with a price tag, of course, but our experts say that no matter what your budget is, you can still take advantage of trends that matter to you.

### IF YOU’RE ON A BUDGET

*Andrea Correale:*

- Do a beautiful wedding brunch spread, which is less expensive because you need less food and alcohol.

*Vicki Colacicco:*

- Look for a “remnant space,” a cancellation the vendor needs to fill that you could get at a reduced price.

*Butch Yamali:*

- Time of the year can make a difference. January through March are options. When it comes to days of the week, Thursday night is becoming popular because it’s significantly cheaper than Friday and Saturday.

*Keith Wedderburn, general manager of the Harbor Club:*

- Work with someone who helps you realize your vision within your budget and doesn’t force you to spend beyond your means.

### LOOKING TO SPLURGE

*Wedderburn:*

- Hire extra entertainment, like servers dressed in costume, or have a food truck outside and after parties with fun activities like making s’mores.

*Colacicco:*

- Upgrade your enhancements with a Viennese table of sumptuous desserts; ice cream Sunday bars or espresso stations with a barista.

### GOING ALL OUT

*Correale:*

- Use table wraps and fabrics instead of the tablecloths offered by the facility, rent specialty table settings, or get specialty signage for the food and menus on the table.

*Colacicco:*

- Spend extra on the décor, like renting special bride and groom chairs and other furniture, and splurging on the flowers.