

# Long Beach

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### From Sweet Treats To Late-Night Snacks, Weddings Are Abandoning Traditional Catering Local Caterers Weigh In On Wedding Food Trends

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When it comes to food, today's couples-to-be are stepping away from the traditional to offer specialty items, more variety, alternative options and sweets galore at their wedding.

Popular wedding magazine Web site TheKnot.com revealed that the top trend for weddings in 2011 is "a wedding that reflects their personal passions, shows guests a really good time and, ultimately, will be an event that people will talk about for months to come."

Today there is a lot of personal touch going into the catering for wedding receptions, according to Sabine Dubois, director of catering for The Queen Mary Hotel. "It takes much longer to detail a wedding now than five years ago."

Both Dubois and Essie Boyd, director of catering for the Long Beach Airport Holiday Inn, said they have been receiving a lot of signature drink requests. A signature drink, alcoholic or not, is a customized cocktail that adheres to the couple's tastes or to the theme of the wedding. This cocktail could be served at a station in addition to champagne for toasting.

"It's really popular to have a drink specific to wedding," said Mary Clay, director of catering for the Hyatt Regency Long Beach. "We might come up with something like . . . a red and white drink [or] name the drink after the wedding party."

More non-alcoholic weddings seem to be popping up with couples asking for teas, smoothies or aqua frescas. "What's really in right now on the non-alcoholic side is flavored ice teas," she said. "They are refreshing and a little sweet." Dubois said she recently put together a smoothie station at a summer wedding for those wanting a non-alcoholic cool-down. "During the summertime the smoothies are very refreshing," Dubois said.

Chef Paul Buchanan of local catering company Primal Alchemy said the aqua frescas and fresh fruit purees are popular among those couples trying to avoid sodas. "I would have to say probably one out of 10 weddings [I cater] has sodas," he said. "Every other wedding is going to have the aqua frescas or a nice water and signature drinks." Buchanan said he is catering a wedding in September in which the bride wanted watermelon aqua frescas rather than sodas for a healthier option.

Bridal parties today are coming to catering directors very informed on health and with creative ideas, Dubois said. More often couples are asking for more options for guests, from gluten-free to vegan to kosher items on the menu. "People are becoming more aware of eating organic and farm fresh," Clay said.

Caterers are also offering more choices than ever before due to food allergies and special diets. "I've seen a lot more food allergies," Dubois said, where guests need to avoid nuts, shellfish, egg, soy or other items that commonly cause food-allergic reactions.

One way caterers are able to accommodate this is by offering more appetizers at food stations or setting up tapas stations. Tapas is the name for a wide variety of snacks or appetizers of Spanish

Jeff Catubig, food and beverage manager for the Hyatt Regency Long Beach, pours a personalized cocktail designed for a wedding party. Trending now is specialty cocktails made with colored liqueurs or certain flavors that adhere to the wedding theme, served before the nuptials or at the reception. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

cuisine. At weddings, tapas stations may offer small portions of an entrée or bite-size hors d'oeuvres.

This is a shift from the typical plated meals Boyd has done at the Holiday Inn. "I've now had wedding receptions where all the bride wanted was heavy appetizers," to replace the main meal, Boyd said. "It was rare to have appetizers with wedding receptions."

Clay agreed about the tapas trend, though the Hyatt is still doing more plated meals. "We don't do a lot of Tapas style, but it can be very popular." The same goes for The Queen Mary, where Dubois said 85-90 percent of couples are still looking for a plated meal of filet mignon, fish or "something nice."

Late night meals are also coming online, as wedding reception guests keep the party going into the night. "More and more I'm seeing couples at 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. adding a coffee station or appetizers or tapas," Dubois said.

Earlier this year, Buchanan catered a wedding family style, with a late night meal at the end of the night. "The bride had an Australian mother, an Indian father and the groom was Hispanic," he said. "In this case, we did more eclectic California appetizers, but for dinner had . . . traditional Indian food cooked from scratch. They had a wedding cake, and then late night snacks [from a] taco bar."

The late meal is being added to many weddings this year. It's popular to have sliders, tacos, appetizers or even food trucks show up at the venue, "anything that's meant to sober you up in a sense," Clay said. "An antipasto platter or a cheese board is big to have at the end as well."

Following the food station trend, couples are putting out a full display of sweet treats for guests near the end of the reception. Candy bars are really big right now, Clay said. "Couples are putting out retro candy, putting them in jars and giving people a bag that they fill themselves with all the candy from the different jars. That's kind of their gift or their favor. That's really big right now. Everybody likes to do candy."

Dubois agreed, noting that couples are putting out anything from chocolate truffles to Gummi Bears to Kit-Kats. Boyd has also seen this trend. "Candy displays are what they want," she said. "That's been really popular." ■

