

## The Wedding Reception

Why a reception?

Wedding feasts have been a part of the marriage tradition around the world since early times. It is not only an opportunity to celebrate the new union, but the feast starts the new couple off on a path of joy and good wishes for a happy life.

Wedding Traditions:

The reception holds many rituals that are carried over from past generations and cultures. The throwing of the bridal bouquet first began as throwing the bride's garter in 14<sup>th</sup> Century France. The removal was not easy or graceful. Finally, one bride gave up and threw her bouquet instead. And the rest, as you know, is history. The entire tradition has evolved into the groom now throwing the garter to the eligible bachelors.

The receiving line can involve the bride and groom and their families or the entire wedding party and takes place as the guests are entering the reception area. If the reception follows immediately after the wedding, you might want to have a cocktail party to entertain guests while you take pictures.

Another age-old tradition is the guest book. Today we can add a modern twist and have a friend with a video camera film guests as they give their best wishes to the bride and groom. Not only will the tape last a lifetime, over the years you'll enjoy watching your friends as they ham it up for the lens. Here's another thought. Get a favorite photograph of you and your spouse-to-be. Have it blown up to poster size (any copy and print store can do it inexpensively) and slightly faded. Have the poster hanging at the reception with colorful markers nearby and invite your guests to sign the image as they would the Guest Book. Remember - it's your wedding and you get to decide how you want to save it for posterity.

Cake:

The cake is probably the oldest and most important part of any wedding feast. Almost every culture has some form of cake that is shared between the bride and groom - from a cake of meal in American Indian and Fiji Islander traditions to the Romans' use of salted meal cakes broken over the bride's head as a symbol of abundance and fertility. Today the cake ceremony signifies the promise to nurture and "feed" each other.

There are two kinds of cakes that are traditionally offered at modern day receptions: the wedding cake and groom's cake.

The Wedding Cake

There are so many types of wedding cakes today that creating them has become an art form. Bakers specialize in wedding cakes, and quite frankly, they have added a new dimension to the party. You can have your cake sculptured into a likeness of you and the groom, your favorite image or as a symbol of your new life - just about anything goes. Even the traditional white cake is sometimes replaced with chocolate, yellow or even carrot cake. It is your choice.

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And here is an interesting twist for the cost conscious. Some places charge a "per slice fee" for cutting the cake and serving it to guests. One baker cleverly came up with the idea of making several cupcakes (enough for each guest plus some) and putting them all together to create a larger cake. No one knew the secret until time to "Cut the cake!"

## The Groom's Cake

This cake was traditionally a dark fruit cake, cut up and packaged in little white boxes with the bride's and groom's initials embossed in silver. Today the groom's cake is often chocolate and offered as an alternative to the white wedding cake. If the groom is a football fan, the cake may be shaped like a football, or if he is fond of scuba diving, a clever cake decorator could create an underwater scene.

## The Logistics:

### Location

The location of your reception is key. The options are endless and you may have even been dreaming of the perfect place since before time. There is your home, a favorite restaurant, inn, hotel, country club, or hall. The bride's parents' house is a favorite and traditional setting for the reception. If many of your guests are from out-of-town and are staying in a charming local bed and breakfast or hotel, you could consider having your reception there. As out-of-town weddings are becoming more and more common, so are out-of-town receptions. If there's a wonderful getaway location you've been dreaming of escaping to for a weekend, consider having your wedding and reception there.

### Food

Unless your head count numbers less than 30, you will probably hire a caterer. Clubs, hotels, and halls typically offer packages and all you have to do is choose from among them.

Otherwise, you will need to consult with an outside caterer. Here are some tips to help you choose your caterer.

Ask for recommendations from friends

Discuss food choices in your price range

Sample a prospective caterer's food

Try to stop in at an affair they're producing

Has the caterer worked at your venue before? (experience helps)

Who'll bring the liquor? (you'll save money if you bring it yourself)

Will the caterer attend the event herself?

Are seconds expected?

Can you donate any leftovers to charity?

One of the first decisions you'll make is whether to plan a full buffet (guests help themselves), semi-buffet (with serving and clearing by serving staff), or sit-down style meal. If you choose to offer a buffet, be sure to ask your caterer to create more than one line for your guests, so they don't have to stand around and wait. For a large group, two identical buffet tables and four lines is a wise arrangement. If you are concerned about costs (as most people are), keep in mind that a serving staff is an added expense. However, a buffet set-up requires more food to

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accommodate individual appetites (including bigger servings and "seconds") and maintain a generous and attractive table, rather than one that appears "picked over."

A plate or banquet (sit-down) meal service with a skilled waiting staff is always the most sophisticated choice, and is expected for a formal affair. It is also more comfortable and relaxing to be waited on, especially since many guests will be wearing new shoes (and the women will likely be wearing heels) and they'll want to save their energy for dancing.

The most important part of the catering arrangement is the contract. Be sure to spell everything out and be very clear. It is the one piece of paper that you and the caterer sign and it lets each party know who is responsible for what. You are NOT being too picky if you ask for periwinkle napkins and goldenrod tablecloths. Just be sure to list this in the contract. It will save you a ton of worry and headache later.

All catering contracts should include:

Detailed menu

How the food will be served, i.e., sit-down dinner or buffet

Beverages offered, including champagne or punch for toasts

Wedding cake and/or groom's cake - if included

Number of serving staff

Included gratuities

Number of tables and chairs

Set-up costs

Delivery charges

Deadline for the final guest count

Overtime charges

Coat check facilities

Tents or marquees

Insurance against glass and china breakage

You may be able to work out an arrangement with your caterer for the tables and place cards.

Drink

Liquor/Bar Options

With the current trend toward drinking less, you might be fine offering only champagne, beer, wine and an assortment of nonalcoholic drinks at bars.

Plan to have 1 bar per 50 to 75 people.

Open the bar farthest from the entrance first to draw people in and prevent gridlock.

Ways to Pay for Liquor

Cash bar - guests pay for their own drinks with their own money. This is the most inexpensive type of bar, but one seldom used at weddings.

Hosted or Open Bar - the host pays for all the drinks, either by the person, by the bottle or by the drink.

Paying by the person - (i.e. \$12 per person for a one-hour bar) is weighted in the caterer's favor, since people usually drink less than is estimated. (But if yours is a hard-drinking group this might work well for you!)

Paying by the bottle - means that you pay for all bottles of liquor that are opened even if only one drink is poured from some of them.

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Note: Paying by the bottle works well for large groups, but remember toward the end of the evening to shut down a few bars and consolidate the partial bottles at the bars that are still open.

Paying on consumption - requires the bartenders to keep track of how many drinks are consumed. You pay only for the drinks actually ordered.

## Toasts:

The best man makes the first toast to the bride and groom and everyone (except the bride and groom) rises and drinks. The groom should toast his bride and then his new parents-in-law. Glasses for the toast are filled in this order: bride, groom, and then attendants starting with the maid of honor.

## Music:

The bride and groom have the first dance to a song they've selected as their own. After that, the choice of music can get pretty dicey, even if you and the groom agree about your favorite style. When parents and older guests are included with children and younger guests, including your peers, you need to choose music that everyone will enjoy.

For a more formal reception, you should consider hiring a band. Although a string quartet may be too stuffy for your younger guests, a band with a good repertoire should be able to honor most of your guests' requests (after they've played all of your favorites). Even if you listen to Top 40 every day in your car, consider a small orchestra to play great old classics and standard tunes that you can dance to, cheek-to-cheek. A DJ is a better choice for a young crowd, unless they'll be playing strictly "oldies." When in doubt, you can always change the music format through the afternoon or evening; start with the classics, then move to the popular selections when everyone is a little more relaxed.