

YOUR wedding planning BIBLE

Ah, the end of the night...there's
so much to do before you get to this point.
No worries—we got the top wedding pros
to share their planning secrets.

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23

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the cake

It's the star of your reception. Here's how to make sure yours really takes the cake.

1 make sure it's edible Not all food colorings taste great. Colors like red, green and blue won't taste as good as paler shades and whites. So use softer colors for the base and add color with the accents.

2 use your eyes too Of course the taste matters, but don't ignore the presentation. The frosting should be flat, not bubbled or warped; the color should be consistent, without gradation; the tier shapes should be obvious; and the banding should be even.

3 have fun with flavors Chocolate and vanilla aren't your only options—some couples even order two flavors to mix it up. Just keep the season in mind: Heavier combos like red velvet with cream cheese filling fit a winter wedding, while vanilla cake with raspberry filling is great for summer. It's a good idea to start with the cake flavor and then pick the filling.

4 dress up your confection The options are endless, from flowers, ribbons and polka dots to monograms, whimsical patterns and graphic designs. Keep your wedding style in mind (fancy, preppy, tropical...) when choosing the design, and don't overdo it—leaving blank space is key.

5 finish it off right Toppers are making a comeback. Pick one that uniquely represents you, like a nod to your culture, job or pet.

the cake curator Victoria Zagami of Made In Heaven Cakes in Brooklyn, NY



cake conflicts

Simple solutions for when your sweet tooth's don't align.

flavor

YOU WANT

Vanilla

THEY WANT

Chocolate

THE COMPROMISE

Vanilla frosting with chocolate filling (or vice versa). Or, alternating layers of flavors.

design

YOU WANT

Simple and all-white

THEY WANT

A colorful pattern

THE COMPROMISE

Have a groom's cake and a wedding cake so you each get to choose the design you want.

type

YOU WANT

Cupcakes

THEY WANT

Cake

THE COMPROMISE

Have both. Order a smaller cake to cut and serve, and set up a cupcake bar too. >>



bloom battles

He didn't care about the flowers...until you mentioned the bout. How to deal.

coordination

YOU WANT A matching bout and bouquet

THEY WANT No bout

THE COMPROMISE He picks the bout design; you incorporate elements from it into your bouquet.

style

YOU WANT Blooms that make a statement

THEY WANT A simple design

THE COMPROMISE A bout with one big bloom.

materials

YOU WANT Fragrant, romantic

THEY WANT Modern, non-frilly

THE COMPROMISE A bout made of the non-floral elements from the bouquet. >>



the bouquet

Tips for picking your most important accessory for the night (besides him, of course).

1 match your style For a bouquet that's totally you, give your florist an idea of your wardrobe and home décor.

2 incorporate color Color is key so that in photos, your bouquet really pops off your dress. To create more dimension, design your bouquet with a touch more color and your maids' with softer white and cream blooms.

3 add texture Berries, herbs and non-floral elements add dimension and depth for a more interesting look.

4 stick to seasonal flowers If a flower is out-of-season, more often than not, the quality will be poorer, and it'll be more expensive. Every season has its own gems, so trust your florist to guide you.

5 diversify your blooms Traditional bouquets typically contain just one or two varieties, but adding more can create a more showstopping look.

6 show some stem Fully wrapping the stems takes away from the flowers' natural beauty. Leave a bit showing at the end for an organic but elegant look.

the flower power Sierra & Juliet, founders of Poppies & Posies, a boutique floral and event design firm based in New York City





the stationery

It's the first impression guests get of your wedding. Here's how to make sure it's a good one.

1 tie it all together Choose one element to include throughout your wedding stationery to give it a cohesive look and feel. It can be an emblem, a font style, a monogram, a pattern, a color palette or a motif. For a romantic touch, include a quote at the bottom of the invite that's meaningful to you. Keep in mind: While you can have a little more fun with your save-the-dates, your invitations should hint toward the formality of the day, and the design elements that you choose for your invites can appear in the wedding décor, like your aisle runner, table linens or cake.

2 pick the right font Choose a type style that fits your personality, or even hire a calligrapher to create a unique design that you can then print on your invites.

3 be original Some ideas for making your suite stand out: Infuse a mix of traditional and modern touches into your design and wording; have the design extend to the back of the card or envelope liner; layer your invitation on patterned card stock.

4 keep it simple Include only minimal text on your invites so the design really pops. Put any additional info on extra enclosure cards or on your wedding website.

5 pay attention to presentation If you have multiple inserts, use a pocket fold that has areas to display each element, tie a ribbon around everything, or send your invites in a one-of-a-kind package, like a wooden box or a seashell, to create an immediate wow factor.

6 don't forget the postage Find stamps you love, or order customized ones to match your stationery design or wedding colors. Also, ask the post office to hand-stamp each envelope rather than running them all through the machine. >>

stationery spats

Not exactly on the same page when it comes to the design, style or font?

look

YOU WANT Classic and simple

THEY WANT Funky and fun

THE COMPROMISE One picks save-the-dates; the other picks invites.

material

YOU WANT A card-stock suite

THEY WANT Eco-friendly e-invites

THE COMPROMISE Invites made of recycled paper; e-invites for the rest.

printing

YOU WANT Letterpress

THEY WANT The cheapest option available

THE COMPROMISE Letterpress invitations; thermography for the rest.

the paper pro Laura Ching, CMO and cofounder of Tiny Prints, sister company to Wedding Paper Divas

the music

Your reception music can make or break your party. Read on for the secrets to a rockin' bash.

1 get the inside baseball

Your vendors work hundreds of weddings every year, so they're one of the best resources for finding a great band or DJ. Use them!

2 copy your friends...or not Start with what you did and didn't like about the music at your friends' weddings.

3 rethink the band vs. dj debate These days, DJs can offer upscale, polished presentations for black-tie parties, and bands can easily fit with a club-like venue. So zero in on the style and the music that are important to you to help you decide. And if budget isn't a factor, hire both.

4 mix it up Listen, Motown or Sinatra is great, but it's gonna get old after an hour. It's hard to make any one music style work for four-plus hours. Variety is the spice of the dance floor, so incorporate old and new songs and different genres and tempos.

5 set some guidelines Give your bandleader or DJ a list of favorite songs, artists and styles of music and, most important, a do-not-play list. If a particular song isn't in your band's repertoire, ask if they'll learn it. Tons of bands will learn new tunes and personalize your playlist.

6 give 'em what they want A good party should take on a life of its own and develop naturally. So while personalization, style and presentation are important, making sure guests are enjoying themselves is the most important thing. Your music maker should be able to cue in to what guests are liking at the moment and play more of that.

the music master Michael Taylor, founder of Star Talent Inc., a company offering musical services (including DJs, bands and string ensembles), and whose clients include Michael Douglas, Stevie Wonder's daughter and Paul McCartney

band battles

So you're a little country, and he's a little rock and roll? Here's how to settle on a playlist that's a bit of both.

playlist

YOU WANT

Country

THEY WANT

Rock

THE COMPROMISE

A mix of both will keep things exciting. There's only so much Garth or U2 anyone can hear.

music maker

YOU WANT

Band

THEY WANT

DJ

THE COMPROMISE

Go with both, or try a band with a more hip feel that can play everything a DJ can.

first dance

YOU WANT

Classic

THEY WANT

New

THE COMPROMISE

Play a classical version of a new song, or put together a compilation of the two songs. >>



the food

Tips for designing a menu everyone will love.

1 pick your venue first Many venues have preferred lists of caterers (companies they have special relationships with) and may charge extra if you use an outside vendor.

2 ask about the prep Find out what's premade or if anything's frozen before the event. While your caterer will obviously need to prep some of the food ahead of time, the whole meal shouldn't come out of a freezer bag.

3 think seasonally Local and seasonal ingredients tend to taste better and cost less, so talk to your caterer about where they source their ingredients from and what will be in-season for your wedding. Also, keep the weather in mind: No one wants a hot, heavy soup in August, but in the middle of the winter, a warm dish will hit the spot.

4 match the mood While pre-plated dishes may seem stuffy for a more casual wedding, they suit a formal ballroom setting. Serving food family-style creates a warm, intimate feel and encourages mingling and conversation.

5 personalize the menu Like every other detail about the day, your menu should be all about you. Serve your favorite foods, whether it's mac and cheese, cupcakes or tacos. Just keep your guests in mind too: You may love *crudo* and sashimi, but your Aunt Sally might not, so try to mix in a few standard crowd-pleasers too.

6 don't fall into a flavor funk Picking similar flavors for all your dishes can get boring (and tedious for guests who don't love those flavors). Work with your chef to create a menu that offers a variety of flavors so everyone has something they enjoy—including you.

the cuisine connoisseur Michael Stuart Steifman, owner of Michael Stuart NY, a boutique catering company that focuses on local, seasonal foods and a commitment to social responsibility



food fights

Don't share the same taste? How to serve a meal you'll both enjoy.

type

YOU WANT

Cocktail party

THEY WANT

Sit-down dinner

THE COMPROMISE

Set up food stations and tables and chairs, so guests can eat, mingle and dance.

menu

YOU WANT

Southern comfort fare

THEY WANT

Surf and turf

THE COMPROMISE

Serve your southern comfort faves during cocktail hour, and surf and turf for dinner.

style

YOU WANT

Buffet

THEY WANT

White-glove service

THE COMPROMISE

A mix of family-style dishes that guests serve themselves and waiter-served plates. >>



the tablescape

Your tables are the center of the room. Here's how to wow guests when they walk in.

1 follow the rule of three Every element of the décor must be repeated at least three times in order for it to “sink in.” Stick to just a few elements to repeat throughout the décor, so guests will actually notice your hard work.

2 dress up your escort cards People love to see their names (seriously—they never get sick of it!). So hiring a calligrapher to write guests' names on the escort cards will make them feel truly welcome.

3 do a test-drive If you put down a deposit, any reputable florist will make you a sample centerpiece for free. Then borrow or rent a table setting and linens so you can see how everything looks together.

4 talk to your caterer Ask what they'll be putting on the tables. For example, if there will be four glasses at each setting, guests won't see a low centerpiece. To avoid crowding the tables, ask the caterer to bring new (and clear the old) utensils before each course.

5 update your centerpieces You can totally change the look of flowers by placing them in colored or uniquely shaped vessels. Surround centerpieces with votive candles for an inexpensive way to add extra light, which makes everything look better.

the design guru Lindsay Landman, event designer and owner of Lindsay Landman Events

table troubles

Styles don't exactly mesh? Here's how to get on the same side of the table.

look

YOU WANT Romantic

THEY WANT Sleek

THE COMPROMISE You can achieve a romantic look with any color palette, so use his colors and your style.

vibe

YOU WANT Casual

THEY WANT Formal

THE COMPROMISE Meet in the middle with an upscale take on a more rustic theme, like a dressed-up clambake.

colors

YOU WANT White and gold

THEY WANT Navy

and yellow
THE COMPROMISE Navy linens, gold accents and yellow floral centerpieces. >>

the dress

Tips for finding the dress of your dreams.

1 focus on the silhouette Finding the right shape for your body is paramount. Think about your evening wear and what works for you. Also, consider what you do and don't want to highlight. If you have a tiny waist but want to hide your hips, wear a fabulous ball gown. And, always, buy for the body you have *now*.

2 start your search early It's one of the most important things you'll ever wear, so you don't want to buy it under a lot of pressure. Begin looking at least a year before.

3 downsize the search party Too many opinions will just stress you out—stick to one or two friends who know you. Shopping with your mom is a lovely tradition, but talk about what you want beforehand to avoid a not-so-lovely blowout.

4 keep your venue in mind While the venue doesn't have to dictate your dress style, it's something to consider. A ball gown offers a sense of drama and importance to match a ballroom setting. A lightweight, airy dress fits a garden party, and a fun, easy-flowing dress works for a beach.

5 factor in alterations Complicated or extensive tailoring can really up the cost (think: up to \$300 per adjustment for couture gowns), but even a simple dress can be hard to tailor since there's nothing to hide. Get a written estimate before you buy.

6 match your party The bride and bridesmaids should look like they're going to the same event, so coordinate your maids' dresses with yours. Keep their bodies in mind, though. In general, strapless dresses with natural or Empire waists in chiffon or taffeta tend to be the most flattering.

the wedding dress wizard Amsale Aberra, a couture bridal and evening wear designer and cofounder, co-CEO and creative director of the Amsale Design Group (which houses Amsale, Christos and Kenneth Pool collections of wedding and evening wear)

wardrobe wars

How to solve your wedding wear debates.

formality

YOU WANT

Black-tie

THEY WANT

Casual

THE COMPROMISE

A suit still works with a fancy dress.

palette

YOU WANT

Color

THEY WANT

All-black

THE COMPROMISE

Maids in color; guys in black with bright ties.

look

YOU WANT

Trendy

THEY WANT

Classic

THE COMPROMISE

A classic suit goes with any style you choose.

