

# what's on the MENU?

When it comes to wedding reception food and drink, same-old same-old menus, unimaginative serving presentations and tired dining-service formats just don't cut it – especially for today's restaurant-going, Food Network-watching, Instagram-posting guests. With this in mind, we asked industry experts to dish on what's trending – and not trending – in this critically important reception component.

## what's IN what's OUT

INDUSTRY EXPERTS  
DISH ON RECEPTION  
FOOD AND DRINK.



**Brittany Walker, event planner, Culinary Capers Catering and Special Events, Vancouver:**

**WHAT'S IN** You'll see more recreations of favourite dishes, grandma's famous recipes, or food the couple enjoyed on their first date. Think deconstructed apple pie for dessert, boozy milkshakes or miniature corn dogs during hors d'oeuvre service. (At dessert): Savoury combinations of flavours like chamomile and honeycomb with ice cream. The taste of the wedding cake is even more important than the look of it, with couples selecting more unique flavours such as chai or Earl Grey, salted caramel or blueberry thyme. Dessert tables will offer mini-sized treats: One-bite Rice Krispies squares, dessert shots, miniature donuts, petite cheesecakes.

**WHAT'S OUT**

**Buffets. Dessert walls and towers. Pie stations. Cupcakes.**



Above: Deconstructed Apple Pie: Photo by John Watson  
Orange Blossom Panna Cotta: Photo by Janis Nicolay  
Boozy Milkshake with Mini Doughnut: Photo by John Watson

**Martin Buehner, executive chef, The Old Mill Toronto**

**WHAT'S IN** Action stations offering schnitzel sliders, truffle mac 'n' cheese, made-to-order sushi, french fries. Mobile, roving oyster shuckers. Family-style platters – they're interactive, rustic and let guests take as much or as little as they want. Healthier, more-adventurous options. Fresh, locally inspired, farm-to-fork food. The wedding cake isn't going anywhere – it's still used for photo ops and often features a Styrofoam faux-bottom tier. Dessert stations with handmade chocolates, mini-mousses, cake pops, macarons and croquebouches (cone-shaped choux-pastry-ball towers, often with non-traditional garnishes like white chocolate and non-traditional fillings like fruit mousse).

**WHAT'S OUT** Heavy food. Portion sizes will be more restrained – smaller proteins, more vegetables and less-heavy sauces.



Above: Photos by Natalie Bauer | Oyster shucker photo: Courtesy of Oysters XO

Below: Photo courtesy of BottomZ Up

**Shelley Francisco, owner, BottomZ Up Bartending & Events, Edmonton:**

**WHAT'S IN** Welcome drinks have been gravitating towards champagne. Most weddings want butler service and are moving away from self-serve. Craft beers are in right now, especially getting a keg from a local supplier. Signature drinks are all the rage, with couples wanting a drink that defines them: A groom signature drink and a bride signature drink. A summer trend that has been picking up is having a slushie machine for blended (generally non-alcoholic) beverages. Events are also moving away from having wine on the tables to a ticket or butler service to avoid over-pouring or wasted half-bottles.

**WHAT'S OUT** White rum. People are moving towards spiced and dark rum.





**Dylida Mao, owner and chef, La Petite Mangue caterer, Montreal:**

**WHAT'S IN** Family-style platters. Globally inspired food or ethnic food has become extremely popular – we have seen brides and grooms integrate ethnic theme décor and the food into their weddings. I believe brunch/ breakfast receptions or cocktail receptions (afternoon) will become very popular. A much-smaller-than-traditional wedding cake surrounded by mini-artisan desserts and fruit station along with hot beverages. Dessert will not be served at the dining table after dinner as much. Fast food as the midnight table snack, with offerings such as poutine, pizzas, burgers and chow mein.



**WHAT'S OUT** Food trucks will not be as popular anymore due to their lack of formality.

Above: Crostini with smoked salmon: Photos by Sonya Kamozy | Fried Rolls Photo by Natasha Breen | Spring Rolls Photo by Nikolay Donetsk

**Zach Heide, sales manager, The Manor byPeterandPauls.com, Toronto**

**WHAT'S IN** Offering guests multiple cocktail-food stations and passed mini-entrées, followed by a seated dinner consisting of a main course and dessert. Restaurant-inspired entrées – tasting-trio appetizers, refined entrées. Sweet and savoury late-night stations (midway mini-doughnuts, soft-serve ice cream, soft tacos or fish 'n' chips). Bowls (poke, vegetarian), regional cuisines are a filling, interactive and health-focused late-night option. Pie bars offering galettes, tarts, clafoutis; hand-painted cakes, geode designs and variations on the 'naked cake' theme; and interactive desserts (vertical tastings, sauce-your-own or fill-your-own items).

**WHAT'S OUT** Tasting menus or too many courses. Traditional sweet tables, candy bars and chocolate fountains.



Below: Photos courtesy of byPeterandPauls.com



**Quinn Staple, executive chef, Hotel Arts Group, Calgary:**

**WHAT'S IN** Aperitifs and digestifs with small food or beverage offerings that are designed to enhance the overall meal. More natural and less artificial dessert flavours, with savoury and vegetable components. We are seeing the rise of dessert bars incorporating some childhood favourites like doughnut stations, cotton candy, sundae ice cream stations, root beer float stations and candy bars. More up-and-coming is the use of a roaming cart that travels throughout the space to deliver guests different dessert options at their seats.

**WHAT'S OUT** Things may be more popular at times, but we're still seeing such a variety of requests, that nothing ever really disappears.