

WEDDING, ENGAGEMENT, ANNIVERSARY & COMMITMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

# TOGETHER

## Eat, drink, love

Here's what to expect on wedding menus in 2011



It wasn't that long ago that the food and wine at weddings came down to some pretty dull choices: steak or chicken... and red or white.

But that was before many of us became foodies, scouring the best restaurants and gourmet markets in search of all things delicious.

Over the past several years, wedding food and wine trends have evolved at warp speed, featuring everything from sushi-making stations and made-to-order doughnuts to gourmet food trucks.

According to Tiffany Emch, catering manager at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, "Clients seem to be getting more adventurous and playful with their menus."

So with a new decade upon us, what can we expect on the food and wine menu for 2011 weddings?

**Eat**

At the SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills, which holds between 30 and 40 weddings per year with as many as 1,200 guests at one event, what's hot now is serving food that makes an impression.

Every bride wants her wedding to be memorable, and food is a great way to achieve that, noted the hotel's marketing manager, Emily Bernstein, whose own wedding was just four months ago.

**'The flavors have to be spectacular.'** — Jorge Chicas

"Your wedding day is a spectacle, so the food should be a spectacle, too — it just adds to your special day," she said.

"The flavors have to be spectacular. But it's even more special for the experience to be interactive," added Jorge Chicas, the hotel's executive chef, who predicted a trend toward smaller bites with more intense flavors.

Innovative reception stations or "carts" are the specialty of James Beard Foundation Award-winning chef José Andrés, culinary director of the SLS Hotel and the Bazaar by José Andrés. They have included a "cotton candy foie gras" cart, in which tiny squares of foie gras are swirled with vanilla sugar "cotton candy" in front of guests; the "cone cart," which features tiny crisp cones filled with caviar, salmon roe or avocado; and an olive station featuring

the Liquid Olive specialty of the hotel. This groundbreaking appetizer mimics marinated olives, but results in an "explosion" of intense olive favor when placed in the mouth.

It's important to mix things up when it comes to food, said Kristin Banta of Kristin Banta Events in L.A. She's a fan of serving small bites rather than a sit-down dinner, but cautioned that when taking this approach, "you have to know what you're doing so that your guests don't wind up hungry and resenting you."

But she likes to tell couples "it's fun to flip the formula a bit." At one of her upcoming weddings, there won't be a sit-down dinner. Instead, she will keep guests sated with lavish savory and sweet tray passes filled with appetizers such as sweet corn risotto "hush puppies," chilled blue crab spring rolls and Korean-style braised beef short ribs. That will be followed by dancing, and then at 10 p.m., a final surprise: "A sit-down four-course breakfast," she said.

Banta said tray-passed desserts such as tiny bread puddings, spoons of crème brûlée and cheesecake lollipops are popular. But that doesn't mean the wedding cake is going anywhere.

"The wedding cake is here to stay," said Jane Lockhart of L.A.'s Sweet Lady Jane. "It's good luck," she said, adding, "You can always have

dessert — how often are you going to have a wedding cake?"

In terms of cake design, Cake Divas co-owner Joan Spitler is getting requests for textured icing patterns of lace or natural burlap. And according to Spitler, for many of the designs, "three-dimensional paper flowers, fabrics and natural elements are all inspirations."

She added some couples are also opting for an "artsy reflection of their personalities" such as a cake in the shape of a grand piano she created recently.

**Drink**

"Wine comes in at the mouth and love comes in at the eye; that's all we shall know for truth before we grow old and die," Yeats once wrote.

The wine you choose to serve at your wedding depends on your menu and budget. In fact, according to James Beard Foundation Award-winning wine and food writer Anthony Dias Blue, if there's a single trend in wine right now, it's value. "People are finding good value wines that manage to maintain an acceptable level of quality," he said.

1, 4. Wedding cakes with textured icing patterns and three-dimensional elements are popular. Photos courtesy of Cake Divas. 2. The trend at receptions is to serve small, intense bites, says Jorge Chicas of SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills. An easily held can contains raspberry purée, raspberries, king crab meat, edible flowers, pepper and sea salt. 3. SLS Hotel's Organized Caesar appetizer includes quail egg yolk, parmesan cheese and romaine lettuce wrapped in jicama. It is garnished with air bread croutons and Caesar dressing. 5. Interactive stations are the specialty of chef José Andrés. At his "cotton candy foie gras" cart, squares of foie gras are swirled with vanilla sugar "cotton candy" in front of guests. Photo courtesy of SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills.

"It takes a little more attention and diligence to do so, but it can be done."

While wine experts predict the rise of everything from Malbec to Riesling served at weddings, there is another wine that is gaining popularity: rosé.

Not to be confused with the blush wines that were popular in the '80s, "rosés today are drier and more complex," said Dias Blue, author of several books on wine including the recently revised "American Wine: A Comprehensive Guide" (Harper Collins, 2010). The reason they are great for weddings? While Blue's favorite way to drink rosé is as an aperitif before dinner, rosés "go well with everything from spicy food to light cuisine," he said.

Ian Blackburn, founder of Learn-AboutWine.com, the first wine education website in the U.S., agreed, adding that the bubbly version — rosé champagne or sparkling rosé — is also an excellent choice. "Like rosé, it goes with everything, but it's great on its own, too," Blackburn said. "It's really the ultimate beverage." What could be more perfect for your wedding toasts?

**Love**

"We'll continue to see late-night munchie snacks, such as quesadillas, mini tacos, mini-Ruben sandwiches, mini-milkshakes, tiny shots of milk with warm chocolate chip cookies," Emch said. She predicted, though, that wedding menus in the new decade will be very personal.

"Couples are also getting bolder in terms of serving foods that reflect their heritage or places important to them," she said. For example, a menu Emch is creating for a couple who plan to honeymoon in Germany includes a German bratwurst and schnitzel station.

Steak or chicken, step aside. In the end, Banta said, when it comes to food and wine in weddings today, it's all about customizing to the individual. "We ask our client, 'What do you love?' And then we go from there." How delicious is that?

— Jennifer Evans Gardner  
Custom Publishing Writer

Sarah Bakhtiar —  
Evangelos Raptodimos



On the Greek island of Mykonos, in the summer of 2008, a group of American tourists were dancing at an outdoor bar on the beach. A Greek observer was particularly taken with a young woman in an animal-print bikini. "Look at that tiger," he said to his companion.

The observer was Evangelos Raptodimos, a construction contractor from Athens. He had come to the island with a friend, Panagiotis Mitsiou, who happened to be the Americans' tour bus driver. When it came time to return to the hotel, Raptodimos hopped on the bus with them.

After the young woman, Sarah Bakhtiar, boarded, she took the seat behind him and they struck up a conversation. That night, the bus dropped the tour group at a club. Raptodimos wanted to join them, but Mitsiou, who couldn't drink because he was on the job, wanted to go to a restaurant instead. Raptodimos accompanied him — but could think of nothing all night except Bakhtiar back at the club in a lovely long dress.

At the end of the evening, when the bus picked the tourists up, Raptodimos and Bakhtiar sat together. After dancing all day and all night, she was exhausted and rested her head on his shoulder. He was amazed at how much she seemed to trust him. "Do you want me to put my arm around you?" he asked. "Yes, please," she said, then fell asleep.

The next morning the tour was heading to other islands, and Raptodimos met Bakhtiar in the lobby to see her off. Just before she returned to the States, they saw each other one more time, in Athens, where they went to dinner and took a long walk on the beach.

"I felt like I'd known her for a long time and could say anything," Raptodimos said. They had their first kiss on the sand, the lights of a distant pier glowing behind them.

Bakhtiar returned home to Woodland Hills and her job as a hairstylist at Salon Syndicate in Encino. The couple stayed in touch via Skype, talking and typing. "We Skyped till our fingers were raw," she said.

Raptodimos visited Bakhtiar in California, and she returned to Greece, but it was clear their relationship could not survive on Skype alone.

In August 2010, he moved to L.A. and brought with him an engagement ring. He proposed on Thanksgiving Day.

Bakhtiar, 30, and Raptodimos, 31, were married on Dec. 12 at the Villa Piacere restaurant in Woodland Hills. It was an intimate wedding with 40 guests "who loved us and supported us," Bakhtiar said.

The ceremony, which took place on a balcony against a background of lush foliage, was officiated by Mary Jean Valente of A Ceremony of the Heart.

At first, the idea of a female officiant had shocked the groom, because back home most couples are wed in a Greek Orthodox church by a male priest. But he was won over by the way Valente worked with them to create a unique and personal ceremony. "You're taking part in your own wedding," he said. "Our words came from the heart."

Two days after their nuptials, when asked how she felt, Bakhtiar answered, "I feel complete."

— Maxine Nunes, Custom Publishing Writer

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