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# Wedding

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# In 2016 Catering and Event Trends, THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

BY HEATHER FLEMKE, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR CATERING AND EVENTS, COLUMBIA, MD. PHOTOS BY MINSONWEDDINGS/GIBBONS (UNLESS NOTED)



FEW MANAGE TO CREATE THEIR OWN BRAND, LET ALONE THEIR OWN signature brand, but Colin Cowie, master designer and event planner extraordinaire, has done just that. At the July Experience! 2015 Conference and Expo, hosted by the National Association for Catering and Events (NACE), Cowie shared his top event trends for 2016 and beyond.

#### EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS IS IN THE DETAILS

One of Cowie's core beliefs is recognizing that people often do not remember what you have told or shown them, but they always remember how you made them feel, which is why he mastered design trends that encompass the five senses—smell, touch, taste, see, and feel. To exceed expectations, Cowie says trends in the details convey to the client that you are willing to hear their needs and go beyond their expectations.

For clients planning a warm destination wedding, providing guests with a confirmation and welcome package that incorporates luggage tags, visors, or water bottles, is one of those details. Then, at the event, a flip-flop, sunscreen, and postcard station offers guests a way to relax and enjoy, all while taking your event to the next level. That means providing things that often get overlooked but are always needed—like a cell phone charging station or a "hangover" kit for the morning after. Another design trend to watch for is the escort card presentation. Using a flower wall or living green wall allows you to "bring the outside in," while still providing a place for the much-needed information.



WHETHER it is the delectable bites or the attention paid to table décor, draping, lighting, etc., the details of an event make all of the difference. Don't miss any opportunity to impress either through presentation, design, or branding.

### FARM-TO-TABLE AND LOCAL SOURCING MAKES SENSE

Where catering is concerned, trends in culinary and beverages incorporate unique ideas from appetizers to creative serving options, mythology, and desserts. Two of Cowie's notions involve highly utilizing farm-to-table and local sourcing. He believes in serving the freshest, highest quality food from the farms closest to the event. Vegetables for appetizers and entrées have made their way to center stage with the prevalence of food allergies and increased vegan preferences. Why not make them stand out and be unique? Consider lollipop-style hors d'oeuvres. What about customizing your food presentation to fit the theme of the wedding or event? Creating edible wedding ring appetizers with caviar as the stone is very popular among the brides.

### FOOD AND BEVERAGE PAIRINGS ARE A TREAT

Another new trend is pairings with food and beverages. Ideas like Spanish charcuterie and artisanal cheeses or a raw bar paired with Oyster Bay sauvignon blanc brings the concept to life. Intermixing alcohol with curated food stations or tray-passed appetizer pairings is a treat for many of the senses all at once.

### BYE BYE BUFFET...HELLO FOOD STATIONS AND TRUCKS

Gone is the day of the buffet station, which "brings out the worst in people," says Cowie. Why not create a more dignified, elegant, and exciting culinary experience with themed food stations. A tapas, paella, or seafood station is far more enticing than a buffet and creates an

opportunity for the design element to come to life. Table presentation is just as critical as the food itself, says Cowie. Incorporating beautiful reflective or mirrored pieces will truly light up a space. Customized lighting in the room is a key component as well. Looking for another unique idea for a casual, yet memorable food presentation? Consider food trucks. They are definitely the latest and greatest.

### TOP IT ALL OFF WITH THE SWEET STUFF

Let's not forget about dessert. The macaroon has officially replaced the cupcake. Filled with multiple flavor options and colors, this dessert visually enhances a client's theme, as well as provides an easy-to-eat, delicious, and sweet ending to a magnificent food program. You can

also allow the guests a chance to get involved in the dessert experience with multiple sweet options like a make-your-own cheesecake topping or full-candy station.

### FOR BEVERAGES, THE KEY IS TO MIX IT UP

For beverages, the key word is "mixology." Using fresh herbs and flavors for today's drinks is not only going to kick events up a notch, but it allows for event customization. Providing Bloody Mary, mojito, or signature cocktail stations allows for guest interaction, which is key. Beverage servers with add-in fruits and fresh herbs like lavender or rosemary keep guests engaged throughout the event. This allows them to be an active part of the occasion, and in turn, keeps them entertained. To create additional visual appeal, try freezing different fruits in the ice.

### DON'T NEGLECT THE ENTERTAINMENT

Finally, be prepared to see more interaction between the live band and the DJ. Instead of having to choose one or the other, you will often find them playing together now to create a unique blend of fun entertainment. Incorporating classic guitarists or violinists with the DJ's music creates a new unforgettable audible experience. And just in case you were wondering, yes, the photo booth is here to stay! Only now, props, settings, and design inspiration have led to more creativity and fun.

When it comes to emerging trends, the devil is definitely in the details. Be sure to pay attention to every one of the five senses as you build your events, and you'll be sure to create a memorable experience. --

