

wedding planner

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Refreshing

THREE WEDDING EXPERTS SHARE FOOD
AND DRINK IDEAS FOR THE BAR AND BEYOND

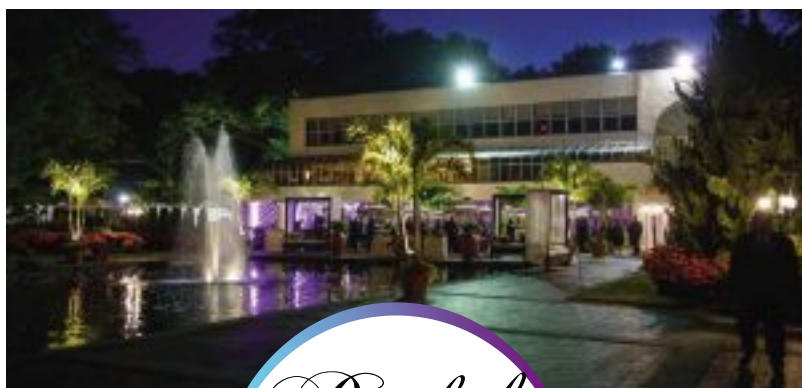
BY ANNE MACHALINSKI
Special to Newsday

Creative booze

While they're not new, signature drinks are still on trend and have evolved, says Ashley O'Neil, the wedding designer behind Ashley O'Neil Events. More and more, brown spirits, like bourbon, are being featured in cocktails, which may or may not be paired and served with special hors d'oeuvres, says Gina Milano, the owner of Long Island Wedding & Event Planners Boutique in East Norwich. Couples also are creating spirit-specific bars for tastings of favorite Scotches or sparkling wines, O'Neil says. And they aren't forgetting presentation — they're adding fruit garnishes or frozen fruit right in the drinks and incorporating unique straws with pops of color, Milano says. Want to provide alcohol-free options? She's even helped couples set up colorful bottles and corresponding flavored sodas, perfect for making a refreshing mocktail.



KHARI BEDFORD PHOTOGRAPHY



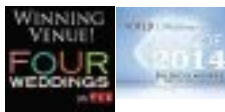
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Cocktail-style reception

While a sit-down dinner used to be standard, many couples today are opting for a cocktail party that lasts the duration of the reception, says O'Neil. Regina Cialone, who works with couples from Manhattan to Montauk as the lead events planner at Nove Events, agrees. "It keeps people moving and flowing," she says, and encourages them to

dance, "not just sit in their seat for five hours." Food stations, which are varied and added every hour or so, might include a selection of mini-sandwiches, a risotto bar, make-your-own taco or fajita areas, and anything else the couple most loves. A word of caution: While fun and fluid, because you need more chefs and rentals to make it work, "it's also the more expensive way to go," O'Neil says.

trends

Beyond cake

"People are moving away from cakes," says Cialone. "Nobody eats it because everybody's dancing." But that doesn't mean they're giving up sweets altogether. Instead, couples are opting for one of a few options. Some select a variety of small, bite-size desserts that they love (think mini pies, S'mores, cheesecakes or Rice Krispies treats). Others go for the more formal, elegant and classy croquembouche, a typical French dessert made of puff pastry balls organized into a pyramid-



MAX FLATOW PHOTOGRAPHY

like shape and drizzled with caramel, Cialone says. Still others might have a simple, naked cake for cutting with a combination of other favorite treats on the side, such as an ice cream bar or elaborate candy station.



FOTOLIA / MOROZOVA TATIANA

Simple and local

"I am thrilled with what I saw this year," says Cialone. "People were scaling back across the board, and were focusing on quality, not quantity." That quality was largely achieved by featuring locally sourced items, such as fresh

produce from East End farms and raw bar fare straight from Long Island waterways. One memorable wedding featured raw clams and oysters from the East End paired with sparkling wines from North Fork vineyards, Cialone says, while others incorporated Riverhead's Briermere pies at dessert time.



FOTOLIA

Gourmet Jell-O shots

Forget about the sweet jiggly shooters that were likely served in red Dixie cups during your college days. High-end Jell-O shots are made with the good stuff — Champagne, bourbon or tequila — and shaped with silicone molds, says O'Neil. She's planning to serve some at a Bridgehampton wedding this summer, and looking to Pinterest for inspiration. One of her favorites layers Guinness and Baileys and is served in a silver spoon. Another tastes like a strawberry margarita and is served inside a hollowed-out piece of fruit. "Are they tacky?" a client recently asked. "Not if you do it right," O'Neil said.

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