

Parlay careful planning into an ideal celebration

Your wedding reception is the time to celebrate your marriage. Just as you considered the style, form and location of your wedding ceremony, consider the same elements when planning your reception.

Provided by Copley News Service, here's a general checklist, offered in "The Creative Wedding Guide" (Heartstrings Inc.) by Cookie Roberts, that may guide you in choosing where to hold your reception:

- How many guests will attend?
- What kind of atmosphere do you wish?
- Will it include a sitdown dinner, buffet or hors d'oeuvres?
- Do you want dancing? To what kind of music?
- How far is the reception hall from the wedding ceremony site?
- Are there kitchen facilities available for outside caterers?
- Is there adequate parking?

You may choose to hold your reception at the site of your wedding or elsewhere in a hotel, restaurant, historic or public building, private club or a private home.

It may be indoors or outdoors. If it is outdoors, consider the weather and prepare for inclement conditions by renting a tent, which can also create a festive atmosphere.

Modern Bride magazine offers some locations to consider: yachts, man-

sions, museums, lofts or botanical gardens.

"Resources for such places are wedding consultants, party planners or your local chamber of commerce, parks commission or historical society," the magazine advises. You will have to hire a caterer to use these kinds of facilities.

Choosing the menu

First, consider the time of day you'll be hosting the event. If you're holding the reception at a hotel or restaurant, the establishment will prepare the food for you and will provide options.

A sitdown dinner is a formal choice and can be more expensive. A buffet can offer substantial entrees or finger foods and can be either formal or informal; it encourages mingling among guests. You might consider butler service for hors d'oeuvres rather than a buffet.

If you hire a caterer, choose one who is established and ideally has been recommended to you by someone you trust. The caterer will typically give you a package price based on a cost per person, advises the "Modern Bride Guide to Your Wedding and Marriage" (Ballantine); it should include food and beverages, wait staff, bartenders and all utensils. Go over all the details so you won't be surprised by any omissions.

Modern Bride magazine suggests you shop around for caterers and ask

for previous customers you can contact for references.

For beverages, you should offer champagne or sparkling cider for toasting, beer and wine or an open bar, which should include all kinds of premium drinks. Make sure you go over your desires with the caterer or reception establishment personnel.

Your cake doesn't have to be the traditional white-frosted tiered variety anymore. Choose your favorite flavors from a baker you know; make sure you have enough for all your guests.

Flowers and music

Generally, continue the floral theme from your wedding at your reception. You may even arrange for someone to pick up the flowers from your wedding site to take them to the reception site.

Flowers decorating the buffet and bar tables as well as individual tables will set a formal or informal tone, depending on your desire. Hire a florist whose work you admire.

You may choose a seasonal theme with your flowers, depending on what time of year you marry. Or if you're marrying in an exotic locale, choose flowers indigenous to the region.

Music adds to the atmosphere and can convey either formality or informality. A formal affair can be lovely if you select a single harpist to play in the background or a trio of classical musicians.

An informal affair may be centered on a rock 'n' roll or country-western band that will invite the guests to dance after any ceremonies.

If you are limited in your budget, hire a disc jockey to play exactly the kind of music you choose. Usually, he or she will give you a list ahead of time and ask you for your favorites.

Make sure you pick a special song — "your song" — when you and your groom go to the dance floor for the first dance, which traditionally signals when everyone can follow you to the dance floor.

Reception traditions

"The Woman's Day Book of Weddings" (Bobbs-Merrill) provides the traditional sequence of reception events from which you can choose:

- The receiving line, traditionally led by the mother of the bride, followed by the mother of the groom, father of the groom, father of the bride, bride, groom, and attendants.
- Signing the guest book.
- Toasting the couple with champagne.
- Eating.
- Cutting the wedding cake.
- Dancing.
- Throwing the bride's bouquet to the unmarried women at the reception and the garter, which the groom removes from the bride's leg, to the unmarried men. The one who catches either is the next to be married.

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