

In love with the Wild West, the beach or a special season of the year? These clever ideas will inspire you to **personalize your party with flair.** by Kristen Finello



Dream Themes



Cocktail napkins pinned to a line make a splash; striped towels invite guests to relax.



Nautical Nuptials

Location: A yacht club, aquarium or private boat are ideal settings.

Décor: Try to keep the event from becoming too clichéd (mix the faux anchors and kitschy lighthouses), says New York City event planner David Tutera, author of *Big Birthdays* (Bullfinch). Tutera mixes in unexpected elements; for example, he likes to use beach grass to make napkin rings that go around silk napkins edged in crystals. (You can use iron-on crystals from a party supply store.) Top each napkin with a chic orchid. Linens and other accents might be in boating blue, bright red and yellow and sailcloth white.

Menu: Serve such seafood favorites as clam chowder, lobster, oysters and yellow-fin tuna. (Include one non-seafood item for landlubbing guests.) Serve crisp white wines and fresh-tasting cocktails like the Sea Breeze (vodka, cranberry juice and grapefruit juice).

Favor: Give small picture frames with pretty shells glued around the edges or stylish leather luggage tags in the shape of a ship (visit beau-coup.com).

Valentine's Day Romance

Cocktail hour: Serve up crimson-hued cocktails, and give them Valentine's-themed names like "Cupid's Kiss."

Décor: Forgo the usual cutesy hearts for a more sophisticated Valentine's symbol: the red rose. Tintera suggests using rose petals to create an aisle runner at your ceremony or a blanket of color atop your tables. You can even make pretty tea-light holders by cutting the stem off an open rose bloom and removing a few of the center petals to clear a spot for your candle. Generous groupings of rose-scented candles throughout the room will create a lush, romantic glow.

Menu: An all-red dessert lounge is a hot choice for a venue. Serve a variety of sweets: chocolate-covered strawberries, a raspberry tart, a red velvet cake.

Stationery: Customize your printed materials—place cards, escort cards, menus and cocktail napkins—with famous love quotes (visit quoteland.com for ideas) or intriguing facts about the history and significance of Valentine's Day.

Favor: Consider small boxes of exotic, spice-flavored chocolates topped with a note reading "Sweet Dreams" or favor boxes filled with candy hearts, or pink, red and white M&Ms stamped with your names or "I love you."

Fall Fete

Location: A quaint inn or converted barn surrounded by beautiful countryside is the perfect setting for an autumn celebration.

Welcome baskets: As overnight guests arrive, present them with small burlap bags filled with cookies, peanuts, Jones Soda (personalize the labels at myjones.com), an itinerary and a map of the area, suggests Ivy Robinson of Ivy Robinson Weddings & Events in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Décor: Use natural elements, such as branches, berries, gourds and leaves. Opt for table linens and accents in rich, seasonal colors like chocolate, spice and gold.

Menu: The menu is fun with a variety of sandwiches, such as butternut potato soufflé, antipasti glasses, cake, serve a double, sweet

wrapped in
h raffia.

Late-night treat: Serve s'mores and hot apple cider spiked with brandy or bourbon.

Winter Wonderland

Cocktail hour: For a dazzling display, dispense drinks from a bar carved from ice, says Karen Clark of Something Borrowed, Something Blue in Raleigh, North Carolina. A perfect signature drink might be an icy cosmopolitan, made with vodka, Cointreau and white cranberry juice. Welcome guests with carolers performing Yuletide favorites.

Special touch: Take your first twirl around the dance floor with "snow" drifting down around you, suggests Robinson. (The "snow," courtesy of a snow machine, evaporates quickly and doesn't leave the floor slick.)

Décor: Icy blues and lavenders. And for a magical effect, don't forget to arrange for the room's lighting to change from white to blue to lavender-blue during the night.

Menu: Classic comfort foods like cups of

ing, chilled fruit soups and finger sandwiches. If you opt for an evening affair, lamb is a great entrée choice. Highlight your theme by offering a selection of flavored lemonades and teas. Serve the lemonade in sugar-rimmed glasses for a pretty presentation.

Dessert: A hatbox-style cake with ribbons in your colors, topped by a gorgeous sugarpaste rose or peony, makes a sweet statement.

Favor: Try monogrammed packets of seeds or bulbs that guests can plant at home.

Summer Beach Bash

Invitations: Send them in small bottles with sand, shells and colorful paper drink umbrellas, suggests Robinson. Guests will definitely get the message!

Cocktail: David Tintera recommends his Blue Wave, made with gin, blue Curaçao, Cointreau and club soda.

Décor: Create an aisle with colored sand. Also, paint different types of shells in your

Having a beach wedding? Send invitations in small bottles with sand, shells and drink umbrellas.

tomato soup and miniature grilled cheese and grilled Reuben sandwiches. Round out the menu with a pork and beef tenderloin carving station and a station serving Asian dim sum.

Dessert: Consider a three-tiered "present" cake topped with a monogrammed white chocolate bow and filled with luscious chocolate mousse and fresh berries.

Favor: Guests will love small, old-fashioned snow globes or tiny potted evergreens.

Spring Fling

Location and time: Choose a botanical garden, rose garden or arboretum, says Clark. She also recommends having your event in the middle of the day to take advantage of beautiful weather.

Cocktail: Add raspberries to flutes of champagne for a special toast.

Décor: Get a fresh, clean feel with table linens in shades of yellow and green and centerpieces of tulips and daffodils with baby grasses worked in. Or go for shades of pink, with centerpieces of roses, lilies and peonies in moss-covered urns.

Menu: Serve a light lunch or a tea featuring a mixed-green salad with citrus-lime dress-

wedding colors and use them as place-card holders; cluster them around your centerpieces as well. Tuck candles into hurricane lamps. When it comes to colors, go with shades of blue and white or silver, or vibrant tropical hues like pink, fuchsia and orange.

Special touch: Attach your programs to Frisbees that are distributed to guests as they arrive at the ceremony.

Menu: Choose chilled soups and grilled steak, fish or oysters. Or go with steaming pots of lobsters and oam on the cob.

Dessert: Try a beery take on tradition: Decorate your wedding cake with sea-blue ribbons and top it with painted shells.

Favor: Treat guests to personalized inflatable beach balls or brightly colored beach towels.

Green Party

Location: Have your wedding outdoors, and enjoy Mother Nature's stunning backdrop of trees, grass and flowers.

Stationery: Print your invitations (and programs) on recycled paper.

Décor: Grassy green and crisp white work perfectly for table linens. Choose locally grown blooms

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Dream Themes

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or grow your own, or order organic blooms through websites like organicbouquet.com. For centerpieces, potted plants are more environmentally friendly than cut flowers because they can be replanted. Use soy candles, which burn cleaner than other types.

Menu: Select food that is grown or raised locally; shop greenmarkets for organic fruits and vegetables. Visit organicweddings.com for a list of caterers nationwide who specialize in organic and vegetarian cuisine; some of these vendors also do wedding cakes.

For dessert: Serve an organic wedding cake topped with organic fondant, green cymbidium orchids and evergreen leaves or other fresh flowers and greens.

Send-off: Replace rice or confetti with organic, bird-friendly millet!

Favor: Make a donation to your favorite environmental charity in guests' names.

A Rustic Vineyard Celebration

Décor: "The beauty of a vineyard wedding is that you can use elements from the outdoors," says Tutera. "Consider grapevines (run them down the center of rectangular tables) and grapes, which can be loosely bundled and used to decorate your tables." Linens and other accents in deep wine tones, green and burnished gold make a tasteful statement.

Menu: A first course of stuffed calamityna figs, a second of pan-seared scallops and for the entrée, a succulent rack of lamb, all with the correct wine pairings.

Special touches: Wine bottle corks make perfect holders for escort cards. (Make a slit in the cork and insert a card with each guest's name and table assignment.) Instead of numbering your tables, name each after a type of wine or a specific vineyard: As guests are seated, they are served wine from "their" winery. Instead of a traditional sign-in book, have your guests sign a magnum bottle of your favorite vintage.

Favor: Mini bottles of wine, of course. Personalize them with wine labels bearing your photos or your names and wedding date. (Check out myownlabels.com.)

Lucky in Love

Décor: Glitz and glamour are the name of the game when you plan a Sin City-themed affair. "When I think of Vegas, I think of over-the-top abundance when it comes to décor," says

Tutera. In addition to lots and lots of candles, choose high centerpieces bursting with a bounty of blooms, and top each table with mounds of Swarovski crystals. Tutera prefers a combination of clear, yellow and amber crystals. To add dazzle, use beaded tablecloths and jeweled napkin rings.

Special touches: Now have some fun with your tables: Name them after famous Las Vegas hotels or signature acts like Siegfried & Roy, Celine Dion, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and other members of the Rat Pack.

Menu: Since Vegas is famous for its buffets, treat your guests to a sumptuous spread of your favorite foods.

Dessert: Go for broke with a towering five-tiered confection in red, burgundy or purple fondant with an ornate design in gold piping or ribbons.

Favor: Personalized poker chips with your names and wedding date, lottery tickets or chocolate dice all do the trick. You might also burn a CD with top tunes from famous Vegas crooners.

Send-off: Make a big-time impression with fireworks or a display of sparklers as you and your groom leave the reception.

Get Hitched, Western Style

Location: Choose a "cowboy-friendly" spot—a ranch or a special Old West location, perhaps (check out Pioneertown, a former movie set in California).

Invitations: Incorporate a simple horseshoe motif into traditional invitations, escort cards and programs, or you might want to go with an old-fashioned "Wanted" poster sporting your photos.

Dress up! Have a grand ol' time by wearing lace-up white boots with your dress and having your groom sport a vest, a sheriff's badge and a Western bolo. Encourage guests to wear cowboy hats and boots!

Décor: Think colorful wildflowers loosely arranged in mason jars and wrought-iron candelabras for centerpieces.

The chow: Barbecued steak, ribs and chicken with hickory or mesquite flavors, and stick-to-the-ribs side dishes. To announce that it's time to eat? Ring a cowbell or tap a dinner triangle. Come and get it!

Entertainment: Hire a caller to lead square dancing or country line dances. Place bales of hay around the area for guests who want to sit out a song.

Send-off: End the evening by departing with your brand-new "partner" in an authentic horse-drawn carriage. ■