



SOMETHING
Borrowed,
SOMETHING
New



From banishing the bouquet toss to planning a microwedding, 2024 is the year that many engaged couples are forgoing tradition and planning the wedding of *their* dreams.

BY MADDY PONTZ



Kaci Willwerth, owner and lead planner at Lancaster-based wedding and event planning company Simple Soirée, has seen firsthand the shift toward personalization—and lessening focus on tradition—in many popular wedding trends.

“Some of the shift—even just in the last 10 years really—is that a lot of couples are paying for their own weddings now,” Willwerth said. “Couples are being a lot more intentional about where they’re spending their money and recognizing that they want to start a life together.”

She continued, “We are definitely seeing a shift in a number of things for weddings. [Couples] want it to be personal; they want it to be customized. They want it to be intentional.”

Some couples are rethinking their ceremonies, opting for elopements, microweddings or other creative reformatting. As is true for many changing wedding traditions, they’re opting for intentionality over formalities.

“I did have two weddings [in 2023] that I thought were so special,” Willwerth said. “[The couples] had their ceremonies—one wedding with 30 people, the other with 50 people, just their closest friends and family—and while they were having their ceremony, the rest of their guests arrived to cocktail hour. The bride and groom were pronounced husband and wife, and went right down into their cocktail hour. They were introduced and just went right into the party. It was so fun.”

Willwerth calls these smaller ceremonies “an intimate, intentional, special moment” for the couple and their closest family and friends.

A growing focus on celebration and joy throughout the big day has also led to a change in the format of some wedding receptions, Willwerth noted.

“The number one trend that I’m seeing this year is what we’re calling front-loaded receptions,” Willwerth said. “Ultimately, what that means is that once the bride and groom are introduced into the reception, they’re doing all of their formalities before dinner. They’re going into their first dance, they’re doing parent dances, they’re doing the toasts, the speeches—they’re doing everything before dinner with the exception of the cake cutting.”





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She continued, “After dinner, they get to cut the cake, and they have the rest of the night to celebrate. ... It’s always been broken up before. ... They’re not going by the norm. ... They’re breaking the guidelines there and saying, “No, let’s get everything done so we can party.”

Some couples are even opting for an unannounced cake cutting, allowing their guests to continue dancing or otherwise enjoying themselves while only the couple, their families and their closest friends pause to observe and participate in the associated photo opportunity.

And—these days—the dessert they are cutting might not even be cake, as some couples are choosing to serve treats that more closely reflect their tastes.

“I had one [wedding cake] that was cheese. Literally rounds of cheese,” Willwerth said with a laugh. “[The couple] said, ‘We don’t like cake, but we eat cheese all the time,’ so they got rounds of cheese and stacked them on top of each other. It was really adorable. We cut that up and put it out as a late-night-snack charcuterie bar.”

She continued, “I had another [wedding cake] that was actual New York cheesecake. They did three of them on a tier. That was their favorite dessert. Every time they have a treat, it’s cheesecake, so that’s what they had at their wedding.”

Unique inspiration has also become abundant and easy to find on wedding planning Pinterest boards and Instagram accounts. Willwerth said she has recently seen some unique sartorial choices from her couples and wedding parties.

One of her brides opted to wear a black wedding gown instead of white. In another wedding, all of the bridesmaids wore white to match the bride, except for the maid of honor. Willwerth said she often sees bridesmaids in mismatched dress styles that better suit their individuality and comfort, unified only by a common color or color palette.

“Everybody just wants something a little different,” Willwerth said. “Some of our couples are getting married a little later in life than they used to. ... The stage of life that they’re in, they have been to so many weddings. They have experienced those things. ... They really just want it to be different than anything that they’ve seen.”

As couples continue to throw out the old rulebooks entirely, and trends come and go, Willwerth encourages people to focus on what matters most to them.

“You’re going to have a lot of opinions. A lot of people think that you should do things a certain way,” Willwerth said. “But this is your wedding day.”