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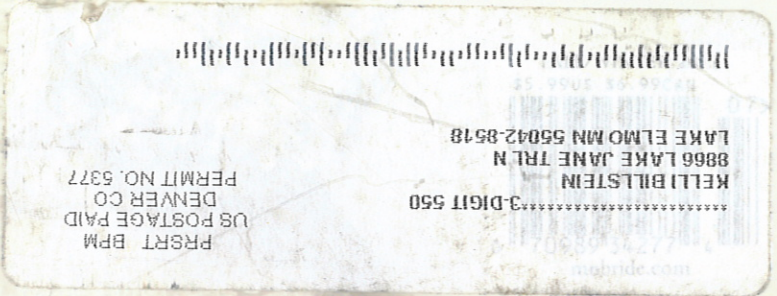
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10 CREATIVE
FAVORS

Chic
**THEME
WEDDINGS**





by
KELLI BILLSTEIN

PARTY OF TWO



RESTAURANTS
ARE THE
LATEST
HOTSPOT
FOR
WEDDING
RECEPTIONS,
BLENDING
UNIQUE DÉCOR,
IMPECCABLE SERVICE
AND
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FOOD.



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(OPPOSITE PAGE)
 NINA AND ROSS HERMANN
 LOVED THE MINNESOTA DÉCOR
 AT THE RED STAG SUPPER
 CLUB, WHERE THEY HELD THEIR
 RECEPTION LAST FALL.

Dining out is one of life's great pleasures. Dining out with someone you love is even better. Tie the knot around these two things and you have the ingredients for a deliciously unique wedding reception.

Restaurants can be great venues to consider when you're planning your big day. They've got the whole package: atmosphere, in-house service and of course, incredible food. Here are some starters to whet your appetite for hosting your nuptials at one of the Twin Cities' finest dining establishments.

BREAKING AWAY FROM TRADITION

For couples seeking something other than a customary, cookie-cutter reception, restaurants are a good venue alternative. Rita Swanson, a wedding planner with Premier Planning Services Inc., agrees that such couples tend to be nontraditional. "They usually pick a spot that means something to them," she says.

For Shannon and Louie Frank, that spot was St. Anthony Main located on the Mississippi riverfront with views of the Minneapolis skyline. Having frequented the area's theater and restaurants, St. Anthony Main was imbued with memories. They decided to have a summertime wedding. The ceremony took place outside the Aster Café, then everyone walked next door to Vic's restaurant where the reception kicked off.

"We knew we wanted something different from the other weddings we'd been to," says Shannon. "We were married by my childhood pastor on Aster's patio under these big trees. We brought in flowers and river rock and slate sandstone. All the guests loved it."

Lindsay and Brian Broveleit took another unconventional angle. Their wedding reception was an intimate Italian meal at one of their favorite restaurants, Bar la Grassa. Self-proclaimed foodies and regular restaurant-goers, Lindsay says they knew they wanted to share a fine-dining experience with their closest friends and family.

"We had about 40 people inside a small room in the back of the restaurant where we had a four-course meal," says Lindsay. "We wanted our families to have this downtown restaurant experience with different courses and wine pairings. I felt like we were pioneers in this style of reception."

SETTING THE MOOD

Ambiance plays no small part in the identity of a restaurant. Whether it's the eclectic vintage design of the Loring Pasta Bar or the clean lines and rich oak paneling at Bar la Grassa, the interior sets the tone for the diners' experience. "It's nice to work with the décor inside a

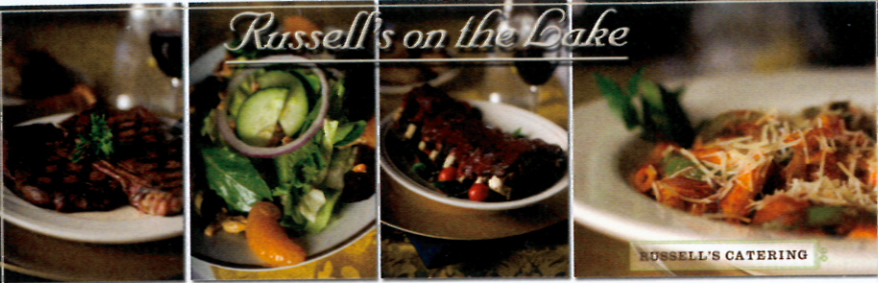


A PRIVATE ROOM INSIDE BAR LA GRASSA PROVIDED THE PERFECT SWANKY LOCALE FOR LINDSAY AND BRIAN BROVELEIT'S 40-PERSON GUEST LIST.

restaurant," says planner Swanson. "The charm is already there. I planned a wedding inside the Dakota Jazz Club once. There you've got exposed beams and brick walls. It's got its own character."

Swanson's philosophy when planning a reception in such a space is to work with what you have. Let the natural atmosphere of the restaurant shine through, and don't be afraid to get creative. "The Dakota has a big chalkboard

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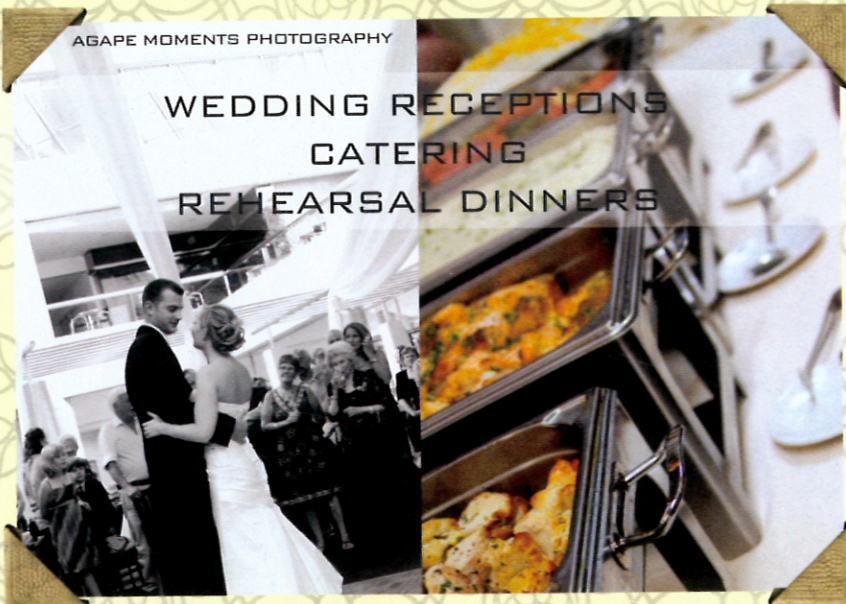
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in the back where they normally write the menu," she says. "We erased that and wrote 'Congratulations,' then had all the guests sign it."

Lindsay describes the interior of Bar La Grassa as "rustic-royal," referring to the dark wood, tiers of wine racks, sparkling crystal and simple design. For Lindsay, the atmosphere's spare elegance allowed her to play up the dining experience in her favorite Italian restaurant.

Restaurant character was important to bride Nina Hermann too, who booked her wedding at the Red Stag Supperclub in northeast Minneapolis. For her, the restaurant's woodsy theme tapped into a common interest of her and husband Ross.

"I grew up camping, and so did my husband," says Nina, who now lives in Washington, D.C. "The Minnesota décor at the Red Stag was something we liked a lot. It reminded us of our roots."

A GOURMAND'S DREAM

A wedding celebration gives you license to go all out, and that definitely includes the menu. If you're considering a restaurant to host your reception, cuisine is paramount. A lot of restaurants will happily work with foodie couples to come up with special dishes, tailoring their typical menus to satisfy the bride and groom's taste.

"We're both gourmet eaters," says Lindsay Broveleit. "We wanted the best of the best. First and foremost, the food had to be amazing."

The Broveleits' reception at Bar la Grassa catered specifically to those gourmand taste buds. They worked with the restaurant manager to design a four-course meal, complete with a variety of bruschetta small plates and full-bodied wines.

"We spoiled ourselves with wine selections," Lindsay says with a laugh, remembering how they decided to focus on wine instead of dessert. "There was a mingling hour before dinner with Prosecco, then we sat down and everyone had a never-ending glass of wine."

When collaborating with a restaurant to plan a menu, you're dealing with professionals who plate upscale meals everyday. The chef and cooks are passionate about food and often happy to give couples tasting sessions—a sneak peek of the food before the big day.

"You don't have to work off the menu," stresses Swanson, who's planned several restaurant receptions. "I encourage my clients not to be shy. Talk to the chef and work out a plan together. Ask for tastings. The chef will personalize the sauce on that beef tenderloin for you, then let you sample it."

Shannon and Louie Frank enjoyed tasting their lighter summer menu, prepared by Vic's kitchen. They decided to serve small plates: shrimp cocktail in shot glasses, calamari and stuffed mushrooms among other snacks. Later on, after guests had worked up a second appetite from dancing, they served a midnight snack of curly fries and Chicago franks.

"My maiden name is Curley, and my husband's last name is Frank," explains Shannon. "So we wanted to play off that with the chef."

SERVING UP ADVANTAGES

Popular high-end restaurants deal with large numbers of customers, meaning the staff knows how to keep their cool under the stress of a busy Saturday night. What's more, they do it with style and panache. This element, along with the fact that many restaurants are equipped for live music, makes them well-suited for orchestrating wedding receptions.

"We had a large space at the Red Stag, but it was cozy," remembers Nina Hermann of her wedding last fall. "A local musician came in for an acoustic set. Then later on we had a DJ."

Even though this was the first wedding reception the Red Stag had hosted, the transition between food, music and mingling was smooth at Nina's reception.

Lindsay Broveleit's reception at Bar La Grassa had the same kind of seamless transitions. She didn't even notice when servers soundlessly cleared dishes and delivered the next course.

"The service was unbelievable," says Lindsay. "I think the night went smoothly because the servers were so attentive. Usually, there are so many breaks in the night at a reception that it's choppy. Ours just flowed really well."

Kari Warwick, owner of Bliss Wedding & Event Planning, points out another advantage her clients have found when choosing a restaurant for their reception: "You're able to showcase your theme more in a restaurant," says Kari. "Also, a lot of restaurants have done receptions before so they have rules and guidelines for you to follow, which makes it easier. The setup for live music, too, makes for great sound."

BEFORE YOU BOOK

Couples should ask a few questions before they make preparations for a restaurant reception. For options located downtown, it's good to consider any parking needs and doublecheck on any city permits you might need.

"I call the city to get parking meters hooded for 24 hours," says Swanson. "If you need them, hire some valets to be out front. Another option is to get your guests tickets for a nearby parking ramp so that cars aren't lined up around the block."

Swanson also checks in with clients about the music: Do they want a live band or a DJ? Either way, it's a good idea to verify that the power source will work for the music selection.

"I remind couples, too, that they should try to book a year out," says Swanson, who notes that some of the more popular restaurants may have difficulty booking private functions. "And don't forget to ask if tastings are complimentary."

Shannon Frank wasn't fazed by the details of planning her wedding along St. Anthony Main. Instead, she assures other brides, "Restaurants are fun and different for a wedding reception. You can make anything you want happen." She adds with a laugh, "And you always know where you're going to celebrate your wedding anniversary!" *

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