

# Themed Weddings

Story: Michelle Turner

**I**t's funny how a girl's perception of THE perfect wedding "event" changes with age. When I was six, I dreamed of being Cinderella in a fluffy ball gown—complete with Prince Charming and a glass pumpkin coach to whisk us away after the grand affair. At sixteen, I longed for an antebellum-style hoop gown, complete with an austere southern mansion in the backdrop and a beau, resembling Clark Gable, standing on the porch. At twenty-six, I was simply trying to find time to date while reconsidering the bribery check my parents dangled over my head. They hoped to avoid the second house mortgage so often accompanied with a 250-guest wedding while I weighed the pros and cons of eloping versus the absence of parties and gifts upon my return.

Whatever your ideal wedding is, one thing is clear: there are NO rules when it comes to the event, and contem-

porary couples continue to push the concept of "tradition" to new levels. Themed wedding events, like destination weddings, are a growing trend in the event industry and become more popular each year. Traditionally, many reserved thematic notions solely for wedding showers and bachelorette parties. Now, no event is safe—from engagement parties to rehearsal dinners to.....yes.....even the wedding day itself. Couples are going to great lengths to ensure that their event is one that makes a lasting impression.

Couples are attracted to themed events for many reasons. Some desire a cohesive idea around which to base the décor, food, and entertainment of the event. Others do so in an effort to ensure that their guests have a unique experience. Finally, many couples are attracted to the idea of incorporating a sentimental element or interest that they share into the event as an individual statement about themselves and their relationship.



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One couple's love of Mexican food was the inspiration for an authentic Mexican-themed engagement party at a private home. Hosts worked with HFI Floral Design Group of Royston, Georgia to turn an already beautiful patio and pool area into a Mexican hacienda regaled by the unsuspecting partygoers. Lush tropical plants adorned the area, while buffet and guest tables were decorated with Mexican sarape blankets, hats, cactus, and decor. Mariachi music added a festive mood to the environment and Kellie's Catering of Bowman, Georgia worked with the couple to create an authentic menu which

included quesadillas, mini tacos, black bean & corn dip, fresh salsa, and, of course, margaritas. You might also consider sending guests home with a small token of Mexican paradise by providing favors such as maracas, mini piñatas, or even a jar of the couple's favorite brand of hot sauce.

Another couple chose a western theme for their rehearsal dinner, which leant a comfortable, casual air to the event. Guests were encouraged to "dress the occasion" and many donned denim, bandanas, boots, and hats. Buffet and beverage stations were given a western look by using old wooden barrels as



Photo provided courtesy HFI

bases for the tables with a wooden, circular cut-out as the tabletop. An old-time "Saloon" sign hung overhead and silver galvanized tubs were used to display drinks. An array of colorful table linen patterns including khaki, cowhide print, and red and white checkerboard added a rustic feel to the tables. Seated guest tables included small covered wagon centerpieces on a bed of straw while randomly placed cactus plants, marigolds and hay bales completed the décor.

It seemed only natural for Jessica and Daniel Smith to have a New York City-themed ceremony and reception following a romantic wedding proposal at the top of the Empire State Building. Themed dining stations offered reception guests the opportunity to experience the couple's favorite highlights from the American "city of lights" including Chinatown, Little Italy, Manhattan, and Central Park. The main buffet table was fittingly set off by a three-foot ice sculpture of the Empire State Building with "I 'heart' NY" at the top. Guests feasted upon Chinese and Italian inspired fare in Chinatown and Little Italy while the Manhattan buffet station featured a mashed potato martini bar. Central Park, the site of the couple's romantic carriage ride after the "quarter mile high" wedding proposal, appropriately featured the groom's cakes and an array of cheesecakes (sure to rival any NYC delicatessen). Big Band jazz music entertained guests the entire evening and they depart-



ed with sachets of Hershey's kisses to remind them that, "a kiss is not a kiss without love." What a wonderful way for any couple to share their engagement story with loved ones in this "happy ending" reminiscent of *An Affair to Remember*.

Dawn and Michael Hudson's circus-themed wedding was driven by a desire to host a wedding that could be attended by "children of all ages"—they set out to make it



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an event all of their guests, young and old alike, would never forget. Dawn chose bright, primary colors for her flowers and décor theme. Groomsmen escorted bridesmaids into the ceremony, located in an outdoor amphitheater, carrying bunches of helium-filled multicolored balloons. When each couple reached the bottom of the steps at the ceremony site, the balloons were released into the air. Clowns, cotton candy, carnival games (complete with a dunking booth suitably christened by the bride's brother), and inflatable "Moonwalk" funhouse greeted guests en route from the ceremony to the reception. The reception, located in a nearby open air pavilion, was transformed into a colorful circus tent with bright, multicolored fabric swaged through the overhead beams to create a "big top" feel and individual seated guests tables with brightly colored toppers and coordinating chair ties. The couple's "Dr Seuss" cake, atop a table of brightly colored flowers, leant an additional air of childhood whimsy to the event. But be advised, the inflatable "Moonwalk" was not limited to the guests who were less than three feet tall. The bride and her entourage of bridesmaids did take a spin in the inflatable monster—perhaps they had one too many cotton candy sticks. And of course, what circus-themed wedding is complete without a departure in a Shrine clown car? The trick to staying



Photo provided courtesy HFI

upright in a "Moonwalk" may still be a mystery. But one thing is certain—the Hudson's truly did host the "greatest show on earth."

From engagement parties to rehearsal dinners to the wedding day itself, couples throughout the country are putting a new twist on their nuptials with thematic events certain to leave their guests wanting more. The most important aspect to remember is that what makes a themed event personal is its reflection of your individual personalities and relationship together. This key ingredient will act as a roadmap to guide you through the remaining decisions on how to personalize your themed event with clever details that will leave your guests wanting more and talking about it for years to come. □

*Michele Turner is the owner of Consultants Unlimited, a special event consulting planning and design group specializing in wedding ceremonies and receptions. For information, visit [www.consultants-unlimited.com](http://www.consultants-unlimited.com).*



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