

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Why Food, Cuisine and Presentation maybe the single most important aspect of a wedding?

Food presentation by E-Factor



Food display at a winter afternoon event by E-Factor



Large spoon pass around canape tray by OTT

For times immemorial, pleasing the guests' taste palates has been one of the most important objectives of the family, planner and the caterer of any social event, especially weddings. However, with the prevalent concept of Fine Dining, it is equally important that ample focus is put on the presentation of food. With new cuisines doing the rounds, presentation concepts are becoming more and more innovative. However the elite client knows his food well; very well. Therefore maintaining authenticity has become more crucial than ever before. Pack in all this, with the challenge of delivery in a foreign land, and you know the seamless working together of the caterer / food stylist and wedding planner is imperative!

What really goes into dishing out the best cuisines at an international location? Taste and presentation, being two sides of the same coin; should they be given equal importance to ensure the success of an event? Does the synchronization between the catering company and wedding planner have any bearing on the fate of an event? What about staying ahead of times when it comes to trends in cuisines and presentation versus authenticity and ethnicity of food? ExCel gathers insights from the experts, to reveal it all...

TASTE V/S PRESENTATION

There is no reason why food can't taste and look good at the same time. Food that doesn't look good, is perhaps not going to be consumed as much. However, attention to detail is important while cooking, because if the flavours are not right, just good presentation will not do the trick.

Neha Seth Arora, Director, Var Vadhu Wedding Management estimates both parameters to be interconnected and highly impactful in making an event successful. She explains, "Food that is presented artistically, differently and with a professional touch is always preferred by the guests at any occasion and if it also tickles the right taste buds, an everlasting impression is created in the minds of the guests."

Speaking on similar lines, Hriday Daswaney of Viwaaha Dreamz feels both, taste and presentation hold equal importance. However, she reiterated the importance of authenticity saying, "Clients that have Big Fat Indian weddings are very well travelled and aware of various international cuisines and their authentic flavours, be it Thai,



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Neha Seth Arora
Director, Var Vadhu Wedding Management



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Hriday Daswaney
Viwaaha Dreamz

Bhutanese or Burmese cuisine. The days when the so-called Indian-Chinese passed off, are long gone!”

London based food stylist Rakhee Jain of OTT, Food Display and Design emphasizes, “At weddings, the guests sometimes don’t eat the food because it is displayed so badly. Of course taste does matter, but presentation is equally important.”

Interestingly, for Birju Gariba of Platinum World Weddings, between the two, taste, definitely occupies number one priority. Having evaluated that presentation ideas are significantly influenced by factors like catering formats, yet giving visual appeal its rightful due, he said, “Although, I agree that one first tastes the food with their eyes, there is only so much that can be done in terms of presentation, when the food format is a Buffet vis-à-vis a sit down. Therefore, it is extremely important that the food tastes amazing, to have a lasting impression on the guests.

TWO TO TANGO

Although taste remains solely in the hands of the caterer, the wedding planner is equally if not more involved in the presentation. Being almost an extension of the family and acting as their representative, the planner’s role extends from recommendation and planning the menu along with the caterer to providing the right décor for the food and intelligent lighting for the buffet area, ensuring it is neither too bright nor dark.

Known to have created the most magnificent experiences for the blue blooded client, Manika Garg, Director, E- Factor describes a royal sit down dinner with over 400 attendees which the agency executed for a family in Nepal. She said, “It had to be a lavish and grand affair of sorts, similar to a feast hosted by a czar! Yet, it remained crucial that, the décor didn’t cross the line to being garish.” The décor elements and food items were carefully chosen and colour coordinated to match with each other and with the exotic fruits placed in abundance on the long royal dining table, the presentation of the food got a regal feel. She also explained how intelligent sequencing of food is important to ensure that the guests savour each course of food, while simultaneously enjoying the entertainment and ambience at a social event.



Exquisite food presentation at a royal dinner in Nepal by E-Factor



Lotus pond canapé tray by OTT



Thematic center pieces at a polo event by E-Factor



Subsequently, speaking of a Polo event the agency executed in Jaipur last year, Garg explained how all the aspects including the F&B can merge with the entirety of the event. She said “We had to weave in certain elements of decor in the buffet areas and catering, such as horse shoe printed textile for the canopies, horse centrepieces between the food layouts, amongst other thematic concepts, for which coordination with the caterer was imperative. We, at E-Factor believe that an event is an experience that is truly successful, only when all 5 senses of the guests are satiated. Therefore, fine tuning and proper communication between the wedding planner and all vendors/ partners including the caterer is paramount.”

On the more technical and logistical front, there are equally important reasons why there should be seamless coordination between caterer and planner. Gariba listed the necessities while carrying out destination weddings such as adequate space for the catering company’s man power, satellite kitchen space, covering of the kitchen area with marquee, procuring all required permissions, ample electrical points, layouts of the venue, furniture etc. He concluded “Strong support from the wedding planner to the catering company and vice versa remains crucial to execute an event successfully.”

“The planner and caterer must take care of the dining areas in terms of entry and exit points of food and the lighting so as to enhance the food presentation, with minimal external elements that can reduce the quality of the food, for which it is imperative that they work in harmony.” added Amit Hooda, Director, The Wedding Connection.

BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Destination weddings in the country or abroad can be fun, yet have their own challenges for caterers and planners alike. A new kitchen, fewer helping hands and a foreign environment, all need to be kept into consideration when planning menus and themes.

Puneet Sikand of The Kitchen Art Company explained how miles away from the comfort of one’s base, unavailability of important ingredients require recipes to be changed, especially in European destinations, where even to find our good old paneer is a herculean task. “All the equipment and ingredient requisites have to be meticulously planned in advance and shipped way before the actual date, explained Sikand.



“Strong support from the wedding planner to the catering company and vice versa remains crucial to execute an event successfully...”

Birju Gariba
Platinum World Weddings

Glimpses of exotic food display by The Kitchen Art Company



Seasons Group has catered to numerous destination weddings in Jaipur, Udaipur, Goa, Turkey, Indonesia and Macau amongst various other exotic locations. Sanjay Khullar of Seasons Group explained why it is best that the caterers team always take most spices and key ingredients from India to ensure that the quality and taste of food is maintained. Tandoors, equipment for the halwai, chaat, very typical Indian utensils like paltas and skewers, all need to be shipped in advance. “Sometimes, ethnic display and serving equipment is also taken from India to ensure authenticity.”

He also mentioned that all meetings with the wedding planners and décor agencies for finalizing buffet setups are done at least a month in advance so that no stone is left unturned. The Seasons team makes a trip or two along with the host, to the destination of the wedding in order to meet the hotel management. Even the company’s core team reaches a few days prior to the event, to be able to flawlessly organize, settle down and prepare for the big day. Market surveys are done for sourcing meats, veggies, dairy, seafood, spices, rice, flour and fruits at the destination.

KITCHEN CRAFT

ExCel speaks to select catering geniuses and planners with the keenest sense for cuisine, scaling culinary heights year after year, with their sumptuous spreads, novelty presentation ideas and stylish serving concepts at social events and weddings. Here are some of the stand-out concepts designed and executed by them in the past year...



PUNEET SIKAND
THE KITCHEN ART COMPANY
DIRECTOR

“While Indian food continues to hold its rich, regal place and predominance at social events, the consumer searches for that extra snap, that extra pizzazz borrowed from abroad. Thus, the focus on a sit-down service with multiple courses for the

‘Baratis’ to satisfy that worldly feel. Meticulous details go into dishing out the course-by-course meal magic with a slight twist.

Canapés do the rounds, made with dhokla or khandvi as the base and topped with hummus or guacamole. Aloo Chat with prunes served nestled in rice noodle nests or baby galettes stuffed with chatpatta chole or prawn balchow tantalize as the first course, with a simple dish like aloo made inspiringly delectable by introducing fresh orange juice and crushed peppercorn, served with bedamy.

Additionally, the display marks the draw of the evening—the idea of dining, after all, is as much indulging the eye as it is the taste buds. Guests are seated on elaborately laid out tables, an array of silverware and charger plates at their reach. The most expensive damask linen waits for their touch, all against the soothing beauty of imported exotic flowers and the flickering flames of warm candles.

Pre plated, smoked shank of braised mutton with vegetables and potatoes covered in sparkling silver plated cloche are presented by the service waiters, in royal, regimental moves, and introduced to each guest in a synchronized fashion, to intensify the art of dining, rendering it a memorable pleasure. Dessert, the ultimate satisfier remains the queen. Caramelized figs with lacha rabri, macrons filled with dark chocolate ganache served with a Kahlua and cherry gelato and cherry coulis, all toy for the win.

Each and every ingredient is sought from different parts of the world – be it fresh Alaskan salmon, rich truffles, healing herbs or exotic fruits— and they are all put together to churn that delectable, desirable meal—one that is talked about, one that is felt as much as is tasted, one that is remembered. All in all, an acquired, high taste desires indulgent tastes, and the edge of the era is simply to tantalize those tastes to the highest degree, pleasing them, ingratiating them, making them come back for all the more...I wonder where will India’s gastronomic needs reach, in decades to come...”

Buffet layout by The Kitchen Art Company



Puneet Sikand with a team of chefs in Salzburg, Austria



MANIKA GARG
E-FACTOR
DIRECTOR

Exuding good health and wellness all the way on a pleasantly sunny winter afternoon, an experience like this one is truly a breath of fresh air. Guests relaxingly sipping on their wines while savouring organic, healthy and light food in an equally invigorating and uplifting ambience. The thoughtfully ideated experience allowed the attendees to enjoy each aspect gradually, through the event.

The entire décor was designed to create a homely feel and enhance the aesthetics of the venue. Only and only natural elements were used to beautify the place. Each piece of furniture was made from scratch, with mango wood and polished with linseed oil. Wheatgrass in wooden troughs made for aesthetic table centrepieces. The natural settings of the venue were not encroached by artificial components as is commonly seen, so much so that even flowers and herbs were not cut at all, but used in pots. The truss was clad with wood and interesting ceiling installations and stage backdrops were created with recycled wooden discs and wooden foliage.

A rather intelligent meandering buffet layout was created with small pockets which kept the crowd moving, avoiding the formation of long queues. The bar and buffet area were decorated with wooden logs and wheatgrass. The rectangular wooden tables seating 6 with garden umbrellas gave a home-style dining table feel, as opposed to the commonly seen round tables. Appetizers were served in exquisite wooden trays and decorated with wheatgrass, paper flowers and dry lemon slices while the wines were kept chilled in wooden wine chillers.

Chef Ritu Dalmia along with speciality chefs flown in from across the world dished out wholesome cuisine that was much in alliance with the concept of the event. Several live counters were installed with chefs plucking fresh herbs from pots and cooking with them. Imagine oat tartlets with Roasted Pumpkin & Feta served on



Glimpses of food presentation at a winter afternoon event by E-Factor



Glimpses of food display by Seasons Catering

tiny chairs emulating the garden lunch, simple scrambled egg made exotic with a dash of truffle oil and served in jagged egg cups, squid and zucchini lollipops placed beautifully on tall barbecue sticks on a bed of fresh thyme! The F&B and ambience of the venue merged rather elegantly with one another.



SANJAY KHULLAR
SEASONS GROUP
CHAIRPERSON

“There have been many innovations recently in the food industry and therefore to keep abreast with the trends we at our own level introduce different ideas consistently. In terms of presentation, we used different wooden props on the buffet layouts. We also created individually portioned salads and desserts displaying them in shot glasses and round square ramekin dishes. Even snacks (hot and cold) are served in fancy ramekin dishes and shot glasses.

This year, we ensured that more and more live counters are placed during events with specialized chefs for the same. Our newly designed Peshawari food live counter has been very well accepted at some recent dos. We have also begun placing a Spanish tapas counter near the bar.

One of the interesting concepts we introduced this year was ‘The Lahori kadhai on wheels.’ This new model allows guests to have their hot lahori kadhai on their respective dining tables!”





Glimpses of food showcase by Foodlink Services India



SANJAY VAZIRANI
FOODLINK SERVICES INDIA
DIRECTOR

”Over the years we have seen many changes in the food industry. Our client requirements have evolved from having only Indian cuisine in the menu to being more experimental and having more international flavours at events. Currently, more than any specific cuisine, what clients prefer is authenticity, be it a specific region, cuisine or culture. The clients do not want a generic mix bag of dishes from a cuisine. They are more specific in terms of the right ingredients and method of preparation, so that food remains true to its origin.

We saw a lot of colour used this year moving away from neutral bases of whites and metals as done in the past. The buffet setup, tableware and lighting are more striking with contemporary design elements and sharp in appearance. Beyond this, more natural elements such as earthenware, environment friendly bamboo serve ware and traditional paatras have been used as opposed to the conventional dishes and bowls.

Personal relationships are very important when catering to an event as it gives us a deeper understanding of the client’s preferences and overall vision for the event. The menu is well crafted to add on to the overall experience of the event. Although, well thought out and concise, it should offer multiple opportunities for the guests to enjoy the food.”



IDEA IN A BOX!

Speed-O-Chef is a first-of-its-kind, international concept created by Glow Show Entertainment especially to enhance the culinary experience at an event. By virtue of the gorgeous chef’s costume and a secret mechanism, she appears to be gliding on air. The Speed-O-Chef moves around the venue and amongst the guests, at a lightning quick speed. Apart from being a very unique way to serve appetizers, the Speed-O-Chef is also a great option for a photo-op.



“ Food installation is a brand new concept which can elevate the entire F&B experience to a magical new level... ”

Rakhee Jain
Director, OTT

SMOKIN’ HOT TRENDS

With the exponential rise in the scale of social events and gala weddings, every event product and service is getting redefined rapidly. ExCel reveals some upcoming trends that are a visual treat for the eyes and truly elevate the entire experience of dining.

FOOD STYLING

Paying adequate attention to the taste and presentation while also ensuring seamless coordination between caterer and planner, has revealed a specialized function in the catering at social events, termed food styling/food installation. Explaining this concept better, London-based food stylist, Rakhee Jain, Director, OTT said, “Food installation is a brand new concept which can elevate the entire F&B experience to a magical new level. To bridge the gap between the event designer and the caterer is where a food stylist steps in.” The knowledge of food when blended with style and design yields exceptional results, especially when it comes to social events. Apart from many of the high net worth individuals in the UK, the styling company also works with various catering and event management companies in India.



Tiered moss cake pass around canape tray by OTT



Wicker reindeer test tube shots tray by OTT



Live tray by OTT

Therefore delving deep into the event planner’s concept, the ambience of the venue and the requirement of the event, just like flowers, lights and entertainment, even food can be dramatized and stylized to truly make for an extension of the event. Recently, while styling for a garden party in London, OTT created some spectacular pass around trays, live trays and buffet layouts which were in astonishing concurrence with the theme and ambience of the event.

DESSERT DISPLAYS

If food takes precedence at any gathering or occasions, dessert takes the charts of guest feedback. Where variety, presentation and display have been a given in dessert displays, the envelope pushing trend is surely Dessert Tables. While this is a more established trend in international markets, in India, a select few creative dessertiers are evolving their skills to offer this.

Laa Viva, a baking company has stylized dessert displays in refreshingly new themes like Rio (the movie), Oscar Night, Sizzling Snowland, Spanish Fiesta, Turkish Twist, Golden Crosswords, Brazen and Bling, Vintage, Hi-Street, Haute Couture Muse amongst various others. Vinesha Pahwa, Owner, Laa Viva explained, “It is important to start with a consultation with the client and the event agency/planner to get an insight into the planning and discuss the style and tone of the event in order to develop a design.”

With a proper brief from the client or/and the event manager, the look, style and feel of the entire event is infused in the dessert display area/ dessert table, ensuring each element on it and each dessert is in conjunction with the overall theme, in terms of colour, flavour and taste. Most importantly, not just desserts but the entire display area is stylized.

Anniversary brunch dessert display by Laa Viva



2014 Winter / ExCel



“ It is important to start with a consultation with the client and the agency to understand the style and tone of the event... ”

Vinesha Pahwa
Owner, Laa Viva



Beach dessert display by Laa Viva

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