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A push for private vows

Weddings are very special occasions for two people who are in love. That's why many couples want close family and friends nearby when they tie the knot. But even the happiest couples may express some nervousness about one particular part of traditional wedding ceremonies.

Wedding vows are a way for couples to profess their love for each other. However, many couples who want to write their own vows are hesitant to say them aloud in front of an audience. If couples are intimidated by a heartfelt recital of their vows in front of a crowd, then exchanging vows in private may be for them.

Wedding planners and industry experts say that private vows have become very popular. While the vows do not replace the public exchange that seals the marriage from a legal standpoint, they can be words shared in a private moment before the actual ceremony itself. A quiet moment alone allows couples to shed private tears and share a special moment before they make haste for the altar.

The Knot, a premier wedding planning resource, notes that there are many reasons to share private vows.

• You do not like being in the spotlight or become shy in front of crowds.
• There are words you would like to share with your future spouse that are deeply private, and you don’t want to express those feelings to every person at the wedding.
• You do not want to censor your thoughts or words.
• You desire an intimately private and personal moment together before all of the fanfare and rush of the wedding.
• You'd like to recite loving words in a native language that some guests may not understand.
• You desire the potential for some very great candid photos if you invite the photographer to be there at a distance.
• You want to create a lasting memory that is only yours as a couple to share.

The popularity of private vows exchanged before a wedding ceremony is growing. This growing trend provides yet another way for couples to personalize their weddings.
Make a statement with your wedding cake

Brides and grooms may pour over every detail of their weddings, but few components of the festivities may be as fun, especially for foodies, as deciding what the wedding cake will look like. Couples who want to deliver show-stopping visuals often express some measure of their creativity and personalities through statement wedding cakes.

Many couples now eschew the classic three-tiered white cake in favor of a dessert that garners instant attention. Whether the cake is brightly colored or hand-painted, a towering architectural marvel or shimmering in metallics, couples are opting to make a statement with their confections. Apart from clever cake-toppers, here are ways to stand apart when dessert is served.

- According to the Perfect Wedding Guide, a rising trend in cakes is to cover a white or naked cake with translucent glaze tinted in the couple’s wedding colors. This artistic expression can be especially stunning in boho-chic weddings.
- Statement tiers also are popular. The cake may be traditional in nearly every way, but couples then set the cake apart by featuring an elaborate design or a different hue in one tier.
- Martha Stewart Weddings advises that more than just color can be used to make a statement. Lifelike sugar flowers can really set cakes apart. Guests may not be sure if they can consume all aspects of some cakes. But delicate sugar flowers taste as good as they look.
- Hand-painted tiles on a cake are another way to add panache. A bride and groom may be inspired by a European vacation or the stained-glass effects of religious windows and want to add that feel to the tiers of the cake.
- Sometimes a statement comes by way of texture. Even an all-white cake can be dressed up with interesting textural effects. Ruffles, lace, embossing, and 3-D rosettes are different textural components that can be incorporated in cake designs.
- Couples also may want to tell their unique stories with cake. Individual tiers designed to reflect various milestone moments from the couple’s relationship can be quite engaging.
- Capitalizing on the trend of edgier weddings, couples may opt for darker hues on their cakes — even a black tier — or nontraditional geometric shapes to the cake itself or its design elements.

Statement cakes can really say something about the couple getting married. Much like other wedding elements, cakes provide a window into the minds of happy couples.
Months of planning is par for the course for couples about to tie the knot. Much of that planning concerns the reception, and rightfully so. Receptions last longer than ceremonies, and couples are often involved in every reception detail, from picking the appetizers to serve during cocktail hour to choosing the final song before everyone calls it a night. But it’s equally important that couples devote considerable attention to their wedding ceremonies.

A wedding ceremony might not last long, but it is the most crucial component of a couple’s wedding day and can even set the tone for the rest of the festivities. From choosing readings to honoring loved ones to immersing oneself in his or her faith, these tips can help couples plan their perfect ceremony.

• Give the ceremony equal footing with the reception. Spend time trying to put a personalized spin on the preceedings, whether that entails writing your own vows or choosing moving music that means something to you. When given ample attention, seemingly minor details can make for a special, memorable ceremony.

• Choose a ceremony location that is close to the reception site. If a ceremony will take place in a house of worship, try to choose a reception venue close to the ceremony site. This keeps guests, some of whom may be out-of-towners who have already traveled extensively, from spending too much time on the road during the day of the wedding.

• Get to know the officiant. The officiant should be someone with whom you both feel comfortable. This person should know you well enough that he or she can preside over the ceremony and add sentiments that come across as authentic and personalized.

• Do your best to avoid especially lengthy ceremonies. Couples will need to meet the religious requirements if they are getting married in the faith, and there may be some aspects of the ceremony that you cannot cut short or modify. But if you have wiggle room, try to keep the ceremony to around 30 minutes; otherwise, you run the risk of guests getting antsy, especially if children are in the audience.

• Decorate the ceremony space. While the altar and aisle are key places to draw attention, couples also can dress up the chairs/pews, ceiling (if allowed), and entrance to the space to make it welcoming and romantic. Even wedding ceremonies that likely won’t run long can benefit from some pre-wedding planning.
Brides and grooms once felt compelled to conform to the trappings of traditional weddings. From uber-romantic vows to pastel colors to the penultimate white tiered cake, various wedding components were long considered must-haves. But modern couples are increasingly expressing their individuality, and even embracing more edgy and adventurous elements, when planning their weddings.

According to The Knot, a leading bridal resource and information site, today’s weddings are not what they were just a few years ago. Bold colors, exotic cakes and nontraditional foliage, are just some of the elements modern couples are embracing to set their weddings apart.

Adventurous locales
Vineyards and catering halls can be great places to tie the knot, but couples who like to push the envelope are looking to more adventurous locales to impart their unique spin on their weddings. Sharing vows atop a mountain crest at the end of a favorite hiking trail or on a roller coaster at a theme park that harkens back to a first date are some adventurous places to tie the knot.

Outside-the-box menus
Couples may want to break with tradition by offering a wide selection of foods at their receptions. These foods can include items that fit with their specific ethnic cuisines, gourmet comfort foods (think cocktail franks wellington), or foods that fit with their dietary choices, such as organic or vegan options. Work with a caterer to provide a variety of tasty choices.

Bold wardrobe choices
Brides can put new spins on their gowns by adding color and texture. Sequins, bold embroidery, shorter hemlines, and whatever adventurous fashion style you want to impart can be considered. If white isn’t your thing, that’s okay, too. Yellow and slate gray look great together. Gentlemen can choose to wear a black suit or any combination of color and style they want to make a dramatic impression.

Full of flavor
Cakes don’t have to be white with white buttercream. In fact, couples can make things even more tasty by incorporating favorite flavor combinations into their cakes. For example, a chocolate and caramel filling reminiscent of a candy bar might be something to consider.

Modern couples are embracing bold, unique and edgy components when planning their weddings. Putting an individualized spin on the ceremony and reception can make couples even more excited to tie the knot.

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Bring in your centerpieces and try on the table linens

Rentals

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Wedding flowers becoming larger than life

Move over bouquets and centerpieces. Flowers are taking over weddings in a big way. While wedding trends come and go, flowers will always have a place at the wedding table.

The blooms brides and grooms choose and how they decide to display them can say much about the couple’s style. Many modern couples are opting for statement pieces with their flowers to rival the big and bold ideas they’re incorporating elsewhere into their occasions, such as in cakes and clothing. In fact, floral designer Tom Uberuaga says traditional hurricane vase centerpieces are outdated and only focus the eye on the middle of the table. He prefers guests enter the wedding and have their senses stimulated by flowers from all angles. Large flower installations, as well as blooms popping up in unexpected places, are some of the hot trends for couples to keep their eyes on.

Wedding flowers becoming larger than life

Floral chandeliers
There’s no need to worry about seeing over table centerpieces or flowers getting in the way of photo moments. Thanks to hanging flowers and floral chandeliers, flowers are quite literally moving up in the world. Hanging floral pieces can add instant drama and make a large visual impact. Florists can hang flowers from beams over tabletops to increase visual impact, whether as individual baskets, single stems or floral swags. Hanging floral chandeliers are dramatic but naturally expensive. Think about a large installation that forces guests to look up into a sea of greenery and flowers. The smell and the sight can be breathtaking.

Welcome wreaths
Why should wreaths only be reserved for front doors and holiday decor? A welcome floral wreath can be placed by the entryway to a chapel or reception hall with a heartfelt sentiment that shows guests how much they’re appreciated.

Fairy-tale flowers
A floral curtain of hanging flowers can line a chuppah or drape the altar in beautiful blooms. Couples who would like a fairy-tale entrance also can make their debut as a couple by coming through a flower curtain at the reception. Martha Stewart Weddings says a cascade of flowers and greens can be romantic and elegant.

Dance floor blooms
Who says flowers have to be overhead or on a table? With a plexiglass dance floor, or one made from some other transparent material, flowers can be underfoot, creating a magical floral carpet.

Floral necklaces
Brides needn’t carry their bouquets, they can wear ethereal and whimsical floral pieces around their necks or on their waists instead. Couples are urged to speak with their florists about the innovative ways they can make flowers an even more awe-inspiring component of their weddings.

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Wedding favors have changed — and in many cases for the better. Favors have evolved from the inexpensive trinkets purchased in bulk into more personalized mementos that guests can cherish.

Today’s couples are interested in customizing their weddings and offering guests something meaningful, or at the very least, edible, so that favors don’t immediately get relegated to the trash can. According to Heather Jones of Wente Vineyards in California, favors have moved from “goodie bags” toward items that are experimental and fun. Wedding planners from across the country offer these wedding favor trends that couples may want to incorporate into their own celebrations.

Welcome bags
Rather than take-home bags, welcome bags have replaced the traditional favor trinket at some weddings. Many weddings have become multi-day events that ask guests traveling from out of town to attend a wedding weekend. To help greet them and make their experience memorable, couples may fill a gift bag with items guests can use or enjoy during their stay — like a bottle of locally sourced maple syrup or some handmade soaps from a nearby shopkeeper.

Experience gifts
Instead of a candle or a monogrammed cake server, think of experiences to offer guests. A coupon for free drinks at a nearby brewery, a tour of a local attraction while guests are in town or a group excursion for guests attending a destination wedding can be fun and will help guests create lasting memories.

Charitable donations
Some couples feel that favors are wasteful and would rather set aside a portion of their wedding budgets toward giving back. In such situations, a donation to charity in guests’ names can be the way to go. Guests can vote on two favorite charities advertised on a special table at the wedding reception. The one with the most votes will get the proceeds.

Late-night snacks
After a night of celebrating, some guests may want the festivities to continue, but may need some extra sustenance to make it through a few more hours. Some couples are eschewing traditional favors in lieu of making room for extra food or beverage expenses that can include after-party treats. These may run the gamut from wood-fired pizzas to food truck vendors to extra desserts. A tasty take-home option also may be given, such as fresh zeppolis or beignets, or even a personalized bottle of wine. Even if the food and drink is not consumed right away, there’s a good chance it will hit the spot when guests return to their hotel rooms.

Wedding favors are changing to keep up with the times and keep guests feeling extra special.
Weddings have a tendency to be expensive endeavors. According to The Knot’s 2018 Real Weddings Study, the national average cost of a wedding is $33,931.

Nearly half of that ($15,439) is spent on the reception venue alone. As expensive as wedding receptions can be, couples should know that there are many ways to reduce reception costs without sacrificing fun.

1. Choose foods wisely
Pour over the details of catering costs. The Knot says the average price for catering will be $68 per person. If you opt for appetizers and cocktails reception, you may be able to shave several dollars off the bill. Look closely at the pricing for buffet versus plated meals. Buffet service often means having a greater quantity of food on hand, which could drive up the cost. Find out if the catering hall can work with your budget to provide cost-conscious options, like familiar comfort foods instead of gourmet fare.

2. Serve a custom-made cocktail
A themed drink, such as punch or a classic spirit with a reimagined, wedding-friendly name, can be less expensive than offering full open bar service. Some couples also opt to pay for only wine and beer rather than a full open bar that includes liquor and mixed drinks.

3. Book a weeknight
Weekend weddings are easier on guests’ schedules, but not on couples’ budgets. Couples can save thousands of dollars by hosting weeknight weddings instead of weekend affairs. Book the venue from Monday through Friday, as even Sunday prices have escalated. The further away from the weekend, the lower the prices tend to be.

4. Fake the cake
The Knot indicates a wedding cake runs roughly $530. Consider displaying a mock cake for photos and then serve a sheet cake during dessert hour. Decorating foam tiers to look like an extravagant cake can save a few hundred dollars, and guests won’t know the difference when they’re biting into a delicious, less costly dessert.

5. Skip the extras
Reception venues may upcharge for all the little details, such as linens in custom colors or chair covers. If you can live without these extras, do so. Ask for a list of itemized extras so you can assess what you want to pay for and what you’d prefer to avoid.

Wedding receptions are costly, but there are many ways to save money and still enjoy a memorable evening.
Gone are the days when wedding reception menus were limited to the one-size-fits-all offerings of meat, chicken or fish. Thanks to modern diets, couples hoping to accommodate guests may need to provide a wide array of food choices.

It is impossible to pinpoint an exact number, as there are no definitive surveys classifying all dietary preferences, but there are believed to be around 7.9 million people in the United States who follow a vegetarian-based diet. Of those people, around one million are strictly vegan, according to data in The Economist. In addition, NYU Langone Health says one-third of Americans are trying to avoid gluten. The Gluten-Free Agency, which is a consulting group dedicated to helping advertisers, says some nine million people in Canada are going gluten-free now for medical or personal reasons. Toss in the scores of people with peanut or other allergies and even more caution is needed when designing wedding menus.

Savvy couples who have guests’ health and comfort in mind recognize the importance of offering a varied meal plan for wedding-related parties and receptions. The following are some ideas to consider when planning wedding menus.

- **Consider a buffet-style service.** Although couples might like the tradition and flair that a seated/plated meal offers, it creates a much more limited selection of meal options. Buffet-style dinner service often provides couples with multiple choices, and it’s much more likely they can come up with a combination that caters to any food allergies or dietary restrictions guests may have.

- **Opt for food stations.** In lieu of one long buffet table, a modern approach is to have staffed food stations. Foods as well as their ingredients can be clearly stated on food table placards so guests can make appropriate choices.

- **Offer alternatives for dessert.** Wedding cake can be a challenge to someone with a gluten sensitivity or an egg or a nut allergy. While not every guest indulges in dessert, make it a point to offer an alternative to cake. Perhaps a groom’s cake can be revamped into gluten-free cookie bars or a nut-free trifle.

Couples who know in advance which types of dietary restrictions their guests have can work with caterers to devise a menu that suits everyone.
Few elements can make or break a couple’s wedding day more than entertainment. While factors like the weather are beyond couples’ control, ensuring guests have an opportunity to dance or sing along to some good music is something couples can emphasize as they plan their weddings.

When it comes to music, the two main options for weddings are a live band or a disc jockey. Each has its share of advantages and disadvantages. A live band may be more expensive, but it can get the crowd excited. A good bandleader also acts as a master of ceremonies and can pay attention to the vibe of the room, tailoring a playlist around that overall mood. Plus, bands offer live performances, which adds an extra special element to the occasion that can’t be replicated at home.

A DJ is a popular choice, and today’s DJs are often artists in their own right. They know just how to select and seamlessly mix music to create the mood and really keep the party going. Couples who prefer to hear original versions of particular songs — especially for their first dance song — often prefer DJs. The popular wedding planning resource The Knot also says that it is often no problem for a DJ to find and play a song from an extensive digital library, while bands may not be able to learn and perform a song in time.

Couples who can be flexible with their entertainment budgets may be able to enjoy the best of both worlds. There is nothing that says a wedding cannot feature both a live band and a DJ. Such a wedding may just take a little more planning. Consider the scenario of bringing in a band for the cocktail hour and perhaps an hour or more during the dinner service of the reception when live music can accompany the meal. After that, a DJ can take over and drive the festivities up another notch with a late-night dance party.

Some music vendors also do a combination of live and prerecorded music. They may have live singers who accompany recorded tracks, or digital instruments like keyboards and drum pads that can enhance recorded songs. These also are options when selecting wedding music.

There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to setting the soundtrack for a wedding. A band, DJ or combination thereof can make the occasion even more memorable.
Weddings may focus on the couples getting hitched, but weddings also are special thanks to the many family and friends couples involve in the festivities. Some of the more successful weddings are ones in which couples honor their guests and let them know how much they’re appreciated. By incorporating these ideas into their wedding ceremonies and receptions, couples can let their guests know how much they’re loved.

- Arrange seats at the ceremony (if practical) in a circular pattern around you so that everyone can have a great view when you exchange vows.
- Create a bathroom convenience basket for both the men’s and women’s bathrooms. Stock items that might come in handy, like mouthwash, toothpaste, first aid items, spare pantyhose, hair spray, sanitary products, moisturizer, gum, and whatever other niceties you can think of.
- Provide prearranged to-go boxes so that guests can take home tasty tidbits from the meal or dessert table.
- Offer transportation between the ceremony and reception.
- Customize “do not disturb” door tags for overnight guests so they can ensure they get enough shut-eye after partying into the wee hours of the morning.
- Make sure the photographer takes photos of everyone at every table and then share those photos on a wedding website or via social media. Create a hashtag unique to your wedding so that guests can easily find the photos.
- Provide inexpensive slippers or flip-flops so that avid dancers can rest their toes in between songs.
- If valet parking service is not included, ask for an add-on so that guests get door-to-door treatment.
- Always be considerate of special needs by seating guests in places where they’re most likely to be comfortable. Keep elderly guests away from speakers and near exits to facilitate trips to the bathroom.
- Be mindful of all food allergies or requirements and have accommodations set up in advance.
- Honor those people who could not be at the wedding in a special way, including deceased family and friends.
- Include information about how guests can request songs at the reception. Pass on the information to the band or DJ.
- Encourage guests to get up and dance by making it fun. Put song lyrics from different songs on each table. When that song is played, that table has to join you on the dance floor.
- Remember to thank everyone for coming and follow up those in-person sentiments with handwritten, personalized thank-you notes after the wedding.
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