DWeddings

DALLAS' ULTIMATE WEDDING GUIDE



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Planning 101:
Local Experts Tell All

plus!
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ASK THE EXPERT

PLANNING 101

Local pros give us the scoop on what to do—and what not to do—when it comes to planning the party of your life.



THE CAKE MAKER

KELLI DUFFY
Cake Carousel
cakecarousel.com

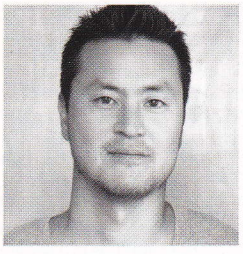
WHEN TO BOOK: A bride should book her cake six months to a year in advance.

COMMON MISTAKES: Choosing a cake artist who does not have experience in the field; not researching a prospective cake maker's work.

GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK: How many cakes do you book per weekend? You want your cake to be cared for and not rushed due to overbooking. How many years of experience do you have?

WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL: We offer a delicious cake that also looks beautiful. We've been in business for more than 30 years, and we take the time to get to know the couples we work with and the style that best fits their wedding.

BEST PART OF OUR JOB: Seeing the finished product delivered and set up. The icing on the cake is receiving a thank-you or talking with a bride a year later.



THE TRUSTY PHOTOGRAPHER

ALEX HAM
Alex Ham Photography
alexhamphotography.com

TIME IN THE BUSINESS: 11 years

WHEN TO BOOK: Typically, most of my brides book about six months to a year out.

WHAT TO ASK: Ask about a photographer's background and experience. Have the photographer show you samples from one wedding instead of just highlights of great shots from many different events. This way, you can check the consistency of the work and how they handle different lighting situations.

DON'T MAKE THIS MISTAKE: Don't choose a photographer according a certain "package." I see many brides choose a photographer based on an agreement to shoot more hours or the promise of a few more prints—even if that photographer wasn't their first choice. I always inform brides to pick the person you love, even if you know that it's going to cost you a bit more or you have to settle for fewer hours. I let them know that if it were me, I'd rather have 100 great shots that I can put into an album rather than thousands of mediocre images. You'll never notice the little extra you spent 10 years down the line, but you'll definitely regret not doing it for years if you end up with subpar photography.

WHAT MAKES ME DIFFERENT: I provide all the standards in wedding photography (bridals, engagements, albums, website, prints, merchandise, etc.). I also provide a few perks that get some great buzz, such as a slide show that showcases the wedding day images at the reception and even an iPad loaded with wedding photos that goes with the couple on their honeymoon. But all in all, I like to think that my best service is my professional approach and ability to provide the best experience possible from start to finish.



THE EVENT PLANNER

YVETTE AUDRAIN
Premier Special Events
premierspecialevents.com

TIME IN THE BUSINESS: More than 20 years. I was on the vendor side in off-premises catering for more than 10 years before launching Premier Special Events. I use those skills every day for our brides, since catering and venue are usually the largest cost.

WHEN TO BOOK: As early as possible. Often brides come to a planner and have already overspent. A planner can give you sound advice on how to prioritize and properly allocate your budget before you start shopping. A good planner will also save you time by narrowing down vendors that specialize in what you need at your price.

WHAT TO ASK: Always ask who will be the actual planner on your big day—it might not be the person you initially meet. You're entering a relationship, and you want to be sure the planner that you have grown to trust will be there on your big day. Ask to see prior work and references. Any professional planner will be more than happy to provide these items. Ask about insurance and what happens if, for some reason, your specific planner becomes unavailable. Not all planners operate with adequate insurance or backup plans, and the only time a bride actually learns this is when there's a problem.

DON'T MAKE THESE MISTAKES: Many times, brides will automatically want to hire their friend or sister's planner. No two brides think exactly alike, so you should interview a few planners to find the right fit. Once you know you have qualified candidates, it's really about personality and communication style. Finally, decide what you want from a planner. Every bride has different priorities, and if you interview knowing what those are, you will know when you have met the right person.

WHY I LOVE WHAT I DO: I am sentimental by nature and have always been a problem solver. I love being able to be a part of such a special time for a couple and using my skills to make it as memorable and personal as possible. We are a boutique-style planning company, and we only select between 12 to 15 couples to work with annually. This careful selection allows us to focus on providing old-fashioned-style service based on each couple's specific needs. All of our clients can count on us to be detailed, organized, fun, creative, and professional. From there, the rest of their experience will be completely customized to them. We have yet to offer the same experience twice.

THE ELEGANT VENUE

MEREDITH STRODE
Nasher Sculpture Center
nashersculpturecenter.org

WHEN TO BOOK: One year out.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER: Caterer experience, inclement weather plans, parking, security and other operational costs, capacities, time that music or entertainment must end based on city ordinance, and smoking and tenting policies.

THINGS TO AVOID: Don't assume that the venue staff will act as planners, that add-ons are included, that the entire venue is available for the same price as one room, or that extending the event will not increase the cost.

AMENITIES WE OFFER: Admission, tables, chairs, tableware for up to 180 guests, security and Nasher staff members on site for the event, Wolfgang Puck Catering, and a list of preferred vendors that includes recommendations for everything from cakes to makeup artists and valet. We also have stunning architecture and soothing fountains—it's an enchanting oasis in the middle of the Dallas Arts District.

THE DREAM MAKER

MARY-FRANCES HURT
DFW Events
dfweventstheblog.com

TIME IN THE BUSINESS: 15 years

GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK: How much experience in the industry do you have? What is your pricing structure? Do you have vendor exclusivity or can I choose the vendors I want to work with? How many weddings do you have around my wedding date? Will you have assistants with you on the day of my wedding? Are your assistants full-time or part-time? Do you have a flexible meeting schedule? Can you show me examples of your planning tools (i.e., time lines, budgets, itineraries)?

WHEN TO BOOK: Nine to 12 months in advance is best.

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT: We want our brides to have the most memorable wedding day possible. We'll do anything to make this a reality for each and every one of our clients. Our service, creativity, and attention to detail are second to none.



THE MASTER PLANNER

SARABETH QUATTLEBAUM, CWP
Sarabeth Events
sarabethevents.com

IN THE BUSINESS. Seven years

WHEN TO BOOK: Immediately! Brides can save themselves so much time and money by hiring a planner first. Not only do we instantly know what venue is right for them, we also have the luxury of having industry relationships, so we can quickly find your dream-come-true venue in a matter of minutes, if needed.

WHAT TO ASK: Is the planner certified by a reputable national organization? How many weddings does the planner take in one month or one weekend? Will the planner you are interviewing be the "day-of" coordinator as well?

THINGS TO KNOW: Don't feel pressured to sign a contract in the initial meeting. Interview at least one other planner before making a decision. Try to keep in mind you should find a planner that complements your weaknesses and strengths. Find a planner who will listen to you and give you choices based on past recommendations.



