

SIL AZEVEDO PHOTOGRAPHY

the toast of texas

Top wedding planners share their tips for throwing a one-of-a-kind, no-holds-barred bash. BY VI-AN NGUYEN

Admit it: You've fantasized about having a completely over-the-top wedding. You've daydreamed about the fabulous setting, the luxe décor and the mind-blowing food. You've imagined the looks of awe on your guests' faces as they step into your reception. Well, how's this for wish fulfillment? We asked some of Texas's most in-demand planners, who've thrown quite a few dream-worthy affairs, to share their ideas for turning your wedding fantasy into a reality. ››

feast like royalty

The standard roast chicken and fingerling potatoes? Not at *your* wedding! Serve guests a five-star meal they'll never forget.

go local Incorporate the farm-to-table trend into your menu for some really fresh and flavorful dishes. Work with your caterer to take advantage of Texas's local seasonal bounty: Include peaches from Fredericksburg, blueberries from Tyler, grapefruit from the Valley and jalapeños from local ranches and farms in your dishes and desserts. Be sure to highlight those special ingredients on your menu cards—you did all that work to make the food extra memorable, so let guests know.

supersize your cake When it comes to the sweets, think big: Have your baker create one large (as in multitiered), intricate cake to display proudly in the middle of the room. Or take a hint from our favorite royals, Will and Kate, and order multiple wedding cakes—we're talking varying heights, shapes and flavors so that your guests can take their pick.

serve 'em in style Now that you've worked so hard on the menu, don't skimp on the presentation. Ask your caterer to create swanky plate arrangements (think: elegantly stacked veggies next to the sea bass or filet, or tall chocolate garnishes adorning the dessert) to be served by white-gloved waiters.





pamper your guests

Whether they hopped a flight or just drove a few blocks, show your guests (and bridal party) that you appreciate the effort by treating them like VIPs.

welcome them warmly When it comes to the welcome bags, don't just settle for a map and a few snacks. Think more along the lines of red-carpet swag: spa certificates, luxe robes, mini bottles of bubbly and even a hangover kit with aspirin, Tums and Bloody Mary mix.

indulge your party Treat your maids to a day of prewedding spa pampering, while your groom takes his buddies out skeet shooting, golfing or fishing. ››

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light it up

The experts agree: For the upgrade with the biggest impact, it's all about dynamite professional lighting. Seriously—it can change the whole energy of a room.

mix things up Ask your lighting designer to create a unique mood and look for each portion of the party—the ceremony, cocktail hour and reception. Choose different motifs and styles for different parts of the day. Start with candles or delicate stringed lights for a romantic ceremony. Then, let a soft-amber glow set a more relaxed tone during dinner. Signal to guests that it's time to dance by dimming the room and then electrifying it with bold red or cobalt-blue lights.

add some personality Incorporate features from your invitations or reception décor into the lighting. Pick your design: Any pattern, really—your monogram, the flowers from your centerpieces or the feathers from your invitations—can be illuminated on the walls, ceiling or dance floor.

make a bright statement Hang crystal chandeliers or striking pendant lamps above each table to add a rich look to the décor. Experiment with dramatic uplighting around the edges of the room and consider renting a specialty dance floor that changes color as guests step on it (if the music doesn't keep 'em dancing, this will!). Point a spotlight at the head table to keep all eyes on you.



amp up the entertainment

Why choose between just a band or a DJ when you can have both (and maybe even a little something extra)? Great entertainment can mean the difference between "a nice time" and "the best party ever"—which review do you want?

multiply the music Booking a different live act for each portion of your wedding day will help set the right tone for each. Have a string quartet or a few classical soloists (such as an acoustic guitarist and a pianist) play during the ceremony to help create a romantic, traditional atmosphere. Then bring in an a cappella group, a mariachi band or a jazz band to serenade guests during the cocktail hour and get the party started. At dinner, hire a contemporary quartet to play instrumental versions of your favorite songs to avoid competing with conversations while still maintaining a lively vibe for the cake cutting and first dance.

double the dancing Now the really fun part: For a guaranteed-to-go-all-night dance party, hire both a DJ *and* a live band. The two can tag-team to avoid breaks in the music and play the best of everyone's favorite party hits.

add some action Ask potential bands or DJs whether they can include an interactive element (other than repeating, "Hey, hey, hey, hey," during "Shout"). One San Antonio couple hired an instructor to teach traditional line dancing at their wedding, and it was a huge hit with guests. Want to give everyone a dance break without killing the energy? Hire a belly dancer or an acrobatic dance group to perform about an hour after the dancing starts so you and your hard-partying guests have a chance to rest your feet. >>



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make it a multiday affair

Why stop at a one-day celebration? Spread the party over two or three days.

start with a "howdy" dinner Kick off the weekend with a rehearsal dinner on Thursday night, followed by a welcome (or "howdy") dinner on Friday to get the rest of your guests involved. Save the surf-and-turf for the reception and pay homage to your southern roots with an authentic barbecue feast that includes all the fixins: brisket, sausage, ribs and your fave sides (corn bread, 'slaw and potato salad, please!).

end with an after-party Maybe the venue has to shut down at 11 p.m., but the party doesn't! Don't just head to the bar next door for beers—book the after-party location (think: a wine bar or an outdoor space where y'all can watch the sunrise) ahead of time.

send them home full Set up a coffee station at the after-party and satisfy late-night munchies with comfort foods like French fries and breakfast tacos. Or treat guests to a low-key brunch (Bloodies and all!) the next morning.









max out your décor

When your guests walk into your wedding, transport them to another (more fabulous) world.

dress up your dishes Forget white! Update your table settings with square black plates or metallic chargers.

pimp out your head table Instead of a round or sweetheart table, opt for a large "king's table" so you can dine like royalty with your *entire* wedding party.

elevate your flowers Skip the fillers: For a lavish look, ask your florist to pack the arrangements "petal to petal."

—Special thanks to Maureen Riebel of Elegant Events by Maureen; Audrey Eichelberger of Timeless Beginnings; Haley Hughes of En Vogue Events; Sarabeth Quattlebaum of Sarabeth Events; Tanya Posavatz of Clink Events; and Greg Reese of Events by Reese

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