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Planning Your Reception

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By Cheryl Fenton

Whether you're looking to a lavish hotel ballroom for a black tie affair or you're beach-bound with a bikini under that Vera Wang, all aspects of your post-nup party should be as in synch as you and your future hubbie. From flowers to music, soup to Jordan almonds, here are a few types of wedding receptions and how to make them work. And if it doesn't all tie together perfectly, remember...no one will notice. (Who are you kidding. Yes, they will.)

Chic & Trendy

Mood: Think guys and dolls, fedoras and back seam stockings (ok, maybe those don't go with the dress). Create the extravagant feel of a hip swingin' reception with exotic florals like Birds of Paradise and orchids, and scented candles in tall glass hurricanes.

Music: It's old school with a swing band or one with a great horn section for that Big Band sound. (Caution: Grooms, do not attempt swing dancing unless instructed by your Bride). If you go the DJ route, make sure he's spinning Michael Buble, Sinatra and Deano for the slow crooner crowd.

Food: Sip on specialty martinis and drinks with swizzle sticks. Dine on rich cheeses, warm hors devours and comfort foods, like a good steak selection (something to make Old Blue Eyes proud). Afterwards, cigars all around.

The Au Naturele

Mood: (Keep your pants on. It's not that kind of party.). For an outdoorsy casual reception, try a rustic location—a renovated old barn, a flowing field or even a ski lodge when the slopes aren't snow-capped. Fill table vases with wild flowers, along with seasonal flora and fauna, including baskets of fruit.

Music: If your reception's unplugged, your music should be too, with folk singers or an acoustic band. Or fill your iPod with your favorites tunes and hook up to the stereo system—no DJ required. Brave brides let guests do the singing with a karaoke machine. You can't get more natural than that.

Food: Fancy shmancy should be at a bare minimum for this party. Choose colorful fruits and veggie apps. Go organic with dishes full of natural tastes from local produce, game or fish. A buffet style meal lets guests go with the flow.

Beach Bound

Mood: Decorate with flowers from the sea—shells, sand dollars, dried sponges. Try a few floating candle centerpieces (check with the venue to make sure this isn't a no-no).

Music: For super beachy sounds, go with Beach Boys or surfer music like Dick Dale. Mellow rock n' roll would also do perfectly with the ocean backdrop.

Food: Seafood lovers rejoice! Fresh fish, chowders, a raw oyster bar—there's no limit. If budget allows, offer a surf and turf with lobster and filets. Want to keep them guessing? Throw in a chicken dish for good measure.

Ballroom Glitz

Mood: Stick to traditional silver candelabra centerpieces and vases full of calla lilies and white roses. Classic lovely form. (Very Romeo and Juliet, sans the messy ending).

Music: An air of elegance and sophistication with classical music from a string quartet.

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Food: A selection of wines and champagnes is a must. Offer passed gourmet hors devours (caviar, mini-quiches, warmed brie) with a formal four-course meal to follow, all with white glove service.

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