

Project Entrée

We asked four top caterers to prepare a “ready-to-wear” entrée that would appeal to guests with traditional tastes, as well as a more sophisticated, “couture” entrée for adventurous eaters. While their creations have either beef, chicken, vegetables, or fish in common, the differences come down to ingredients, preparation, and presentation.

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VS.



BEEF

CATERING: SHIRAZ NYC/SHIRAZ FL

READY-TO-EAT Believe it or not, this is your basic filet mignon, served with fresh peas (on a mound of artichoke hearts), roasted potatoes (diamond-shaped), and four different dipping sauces (artfully arranged). Most of the ingredients are “vanilla,” but the presentation is definitely avant-garde—a way to be stylish, without alienating Grandpa. **Wine pairing:** Whitecliff Vineyard Merlot, 2007

COUTURE This entrée is an ode to kobe beef, a delicacy with a high-rolling reputation. Filets with rosemary “tassels” flank a painted “ribbon” of lemon-wasabi sauce. At center, a glistening dollop of tartare—a risqué choice for any wedding menu—sits on a grilled Idaho potato round. **Wine pairing:** Masi Costasera Amarone, 2005

All plates, Crate & Barrel

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CHICKEN

CATERING: CALLAHAN CATERING



READY-TO-EAT

Buttermilk fried chicken is universally adored. And this rendition is not only cleverly presented, it's also easy to eat (the chicken breast has been trimmed into a tidy square shape). The accompaniments—pole and wax beans, and wild rice—are similarly accessible. In fact, the most obscure things on the plate are the garnishes—green tomato salsa (on chicken) and caramelized shallots (on the beans). Picky eaters can easily scrape them off (as others at the table roll their eyes). **Wine pairing:** Mirassou California Sauvignon Blanc, 2006

CAKES & MENUS



COUTURE Here's a luxe version of a chicken club sandwich. The all-American lunch counter classic takes a fashionable turn with brioche (instead of white toast), a foie gras terrine, and tomato jam.

Celery root, red and golden beets, fennel, *sbiiso* (an herb), and pea tendrils form the exotic slaw. Even the steak-cut *frites* are fancy, thanks to the slices of winter truffle on top.

Wine pairing: Hazlitt 1852 Riesling Semidry, 2007





READY-TO-EAT Vegetable risotto is the kind of vegetarian entrée you could actually get away with serving all of your guests, even the meat-eaters. It's filling, it's a little more elegant than a pasta dish, and it sneaks in the veggies rather than make them the main attraction. This risotto would be doubly palatable to folks who shy away from the unfamiliar, thanks to the use of garden-variety ingredients like green peas, cherry tomatoes, and asparagus. Lavish shavings of Parmesan make every mouthful even tastier. **Wine pairing:** Bodegas Muga Rioja Rosado (Rosé), 2007



VEGETARIAN



CATERING: FANCY GIRL TABLE



COUTURE The vegetable napoleon frequently appears on wedding menus as the lone vegetarian option, but few could top this sassy interpretation: a layer of Adirondack purple potatoes, a plump little cake made of beets and brassica harvest, and a round of goat cheese topped with smoked mushroom salsa and amaranth leaves. Rainbow carrot "polka dots," drizzles of nettle pesto, orange carrot slivers, and an edible yellow pansy give the entrée a whimsical garden party feel. **Wine pairing:** Sheldrake Point Vineyard Gewürztraminer, 2007



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FISH

CATERING: SONNIER & CASTLE

READY-TO-EAT Salmon is a familiar fish that's also elegant, and a simple preparation with very few sexy ingredients will always appeal to guests with mainstream tastes. You really can't go wrong with baked salmon seasoned with chopped dill and presented with everyday vegetables like asparagus, tomatoes, and red and orange peppers. **Wine pairing:** Med-Atlantic Chardonnay, 2007



CAKES & MENUS



COUTURE *Loup de mer* is a type of sea bass harvested in France; it's frequently spotted on fancy-restaurant menus, so foodies will be duly impressed (and probably overjoyed). Here, the fish has been prepared *en croustade* (with bread crust) and is served with Basmati rice and bok choy. A tamarind sauce, accented with wasabi foam, is the finishing touch. **Wine pairing:** Champagne Piper-Heidsieck Cuvée Brut