



Caterers are designing food stations with two goals in mind: safety and eye-catching presentation

# Dynamic Stations

BY SARA PEREZ WEBBER

Savvy caterers thoughtfully compose dishes to look good *and* taste good. When guests walk through an event and pick up their food from stations—rather than wait for their food to come to them—presentation is especially important. Attractive set-ups lure guests to line up for what's on offer.

And these days, guests may avoid approaching a station if they suspect the food isn't being carefully handled. To put guests at ease, caterers are making sure their station set-ups are safe as well as enticing.

At Chowgirls Catering in Minneapolis, charcuterie grazing stations are a crowd favorite.

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## Chef-Attended

At **Puff 'n Stuff Catering**, based in Orlando and Tampa, Florida, “chef-attended stations have been a popular way to put our guests’ minds at ease while elevating our level of service,” says Executive Chef Sean Holden. “Recently we transitioned most of our current offerings to be more personalized and prepared right in front of the guests.”

For example, Puff 'n Stuff created an interactive station where guests watch the chefs cook salmon onsite on a flat-iron grill, building the plate—Salmon Caribbean Curry with rich coconut curry sauce, cilantro rice cake, vegetable slaw and trout roe—before their eyes.

“Presentation is a priority for our team, and we take great care in hand-selecting vessels, service ware and equipment that are inspiring and complementary to the food,” says Holden. For a grill station featuring a variety of composed short plates prepared in front of guests, Holden created stylish handcrafted heat lamps. “Even the smallest details can make the biggest impact,” he notes.

To ensure guest safety, **Chowgirls Catering** in Minneapolis is also relying more on chef-attended stations, where guests are served by staff. “Having multiple stations allows for more social distancing, so you don’t have long lines forming at dinner buffets,” says Lindsay Erstad, sales and events team manager. “Rather, folks can graze at their own pace and maintain some social distancing, even at a larger event. A very popular light option last summer was a cold poké bowl station, at which our chefs curated guests’ favorite combinations in modern white glazed ceramic vessels.”

*Puff 'n Stuff Catering chefs prepare Salmon Caribbean Curry in front of guests (above). Chowgirls Catering's cold poké bowl station (left) was a hit among guests last summer.*



## Single Servings

Just as seeing food prepared in front of them increases guests’ sense of food safety, so does food served in individual containers. “We have a few styles of trendy individual vessels for easy grab-and-go service without the risk of shared serving spoons or other utensils,” says **Chowgirls’** Erstad. “Some examples of our popular offerings include macaroni and cheese in tiny cast-iron skillet; brunch chilaquiles in deep, single-serve casseroles; and a ‘raw bar’ of shrimp, oyster and crab claw in small glass ramekins. With items like these, we create larger grazing stations, made bountiful with full buffet styling and lots of seasonal garnish matching each food’s flavor cues.”

**Footers Catering** in Denver started individually portioning salads and displaying them vertically in glass jars in early 2019, and “it worked perfectly through the last couple years of COVID restrictions,” says Colbért Callen, Footers’ director of sales and marketing. “It allows guests a wider variety of salads to select from, while keeping portions in check.”

Footers’ Vertical Chopped Salad Station, for example, offers four types of salads—two vegan varieties (Asian Chopped, and Kale and Quinoa); and two vegetarian (Roasted Vegetable Salad and Chopped Greek Salad).

*Chowgirls Catering is serving more items in trendy individual vessels (top). With its Vertical Chopped Salad Station (above), Footers Catering can serve guests a wider variety of salads in smaller portions.*



## Grazing Tables



Clients of Normandy Catering love their lavish grazing tables (top and above).

Lavish displays of cheeses, meats and more are as popular as ever. "During the past year and still being highly requested for 2022 events are our grazing tables, which are essentially a charcuterie board on steroids," says Ryan Baker, chief operating officer of **Normandy Catering** in Wickliffe, Ohio, outside of Cleveland. "We sell them in blocks of 25 people, and when you get to six to eight blocks, it becomes a showstopper."

At **Chowgirls Catering**, "cheese and charcuterie grazing stations have been on the rise and consistently becoming more elaborate for some time now," says Amy Brown, founder. "But lately we've had requests for bountiful displays that skip the boards and platters, and are presented directly on the client's table or countertop."



## Inspired Design

"We all know people eat with their eyes," says **Puff 'n Stuff's** Holden. Food stations can play a key role in event design, drawing the eye and encouraging guests to reach for their cameras. Puff 'n Stuff recently created a snack station that matched the look the design team created for an extravagant party, with lush florals and gold accents. "Our team worked closely together to create a variety of house-made sweet and savory snacks to be beautifully presented in unique presentation pieces that we carefully sourced," says Holden. "We provided handheld cups for the guests to fill and carry around to enjoy while they mingled around the party."

Echoing the displays at a donut shop, the Bakery Station offered by **Marcia Selden**

**Catering** in Stamford, Connecticut, features a tempting array of baked goods. "Guests go out of their minds when they see this and get so excited to fill their bakery boxes with goodies to take home and enjoy!" says Robin Selden, managing partner and executive chef. "We typically have bakery attendants there to help assist, and to keep the walls full and replenished."

The company tweaks the display and the baked goods to reflect the theme of the event, sometimes utilizing a mini retro trailer. For example, black-and-white cookies, rugelach and chocolate babka were among the tempting treats offered for the 75th birthday "of a true New Yorker who happens to love New York and Jewish baked goods," notes Robin. ●

## For More Information

**CHOWGIRLS CATERING**  
●●● [chowgirls.net](http://chowgirls.net)

**FOOTERS CATERING**  
●●● [footerscatering.com](http://footerscatering.com)

**NORMANDY CATERING**  
●●● [normandycatering.com](http://normandycatering.com)

**MARCIA SELDEN CATERING**  
●●● [marciaselden.com](http://marciaselden.com)

**PUFF 'N STUFF CATERING**  
●●● [puffnstuff.com](http://puffnstuff.com)



Marcia Selden Catering customizes its Bakery Station for each event (top, left and right). Puff 'n Stuff added lush florals and gold accents to this snack station so it would match the lavish design of the event (left).