

EXCLUSIVE: Scaling Back the Big Day (p.34)

SPECIAL EVENTS

FALL 2023

GOING IN
CIRCLES
(in a good way)

BUSINESS +
LEISURE =
EVENT SUCCESS
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USE A SEASONAL
APPROACH TO
CREATE YOUR
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EDITOR'S PAGE

THE CIRCLE

Here in Minnesota, the air has finally turned crisp: apples, corn, and pumpkins are appearing on farm stands, and Halloween decorations have popped up. The circle of the seasons is upon us. In life and living, the circle holds incredible power and meaning in its perfection, its unbroken line, its symmetry. It's no wonder it captures our attention so completely.

In this issue, we pay tribute to that beautiful orb, in myriad ways. Content editor Amanda Nicklaus has concentrated her efforts into focusing on circularity and all things circular including a comprehensive feature on limiting event waste via circularity, which works to limit waste at the front end of a production (beginning on page 14); she also offers ideas regarding how to incorporate circles into your next event design in our Steal This column, as well as provides information behind the psychology of the circular (starting on page 68). Finally, her drool-inducing piece on seasonality in catering is not to be missed in the Food for Fetes department. While it's great to read about delicious, seasonal food anytime, as a planner, choosing seasonality for your clients' menus is practical and has cost-savings as well. Find out more starting on page 42.

Adding to her ideas is our regular columnist, Christie Osborne, who discusses closed loop marketing strategies. Okay, a loop isn't quite a circle, but I'm going for it anyway! Learn key steps to start implementing closed loop marketing beginning on page 20.

Finally, another circle around the sun, another year, and another registration opening for Catersource + The Special Event. While both conferences have been around for over 30 years, each year feels like a fresh and exciting start! This year we will be in Austin, TX for the first time ever, a vibrant city with plenty to offer everyone who attends. Proposals to speak at the event reached an all-time high, and our planning meetings are stacked one atop the other each week as we dive into logistics for evening events, tradeshow floor activations, conference education, awards ceremonies, and other surprises and delights. [Click on this link](#) to be taken to our home page to learn more and register now for the best rates. Read more about our plans beginning on page 08.

Please take time to enjoy the season, wherever you may be. Enjoy this issue and I hope to see you soon in Austin!

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr
Director of Community & Content Strategy

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FOOD FOR FÊTES

'Tis the Season

How to use a seasonal approach to create your event's menu

By Amanda Nicklaus

There's nothing more refreshing than a change in season, and the menu for your event is a great place to reflect those changes.

Seasonality is the concept of being dependent on the season or time of year. It's easy to think of a fall festival or winter wonderland-type event whose purpose is to celebrate the season, but any event can feature a little ode to the phases of nature.



This means featuring food that is harvested at its peak rather than prematurely, and it relies on sourcing in-season food from local farms and suppliers instead of transporting over long distances when out of season. For example, in the Midwest, tomatoes can only be grown and harvested from outdoor farms during mid to late summer. In the winter, Midwesterners can eat tomatoes, but these crops must be shipped in from places whose climates support tomato growth in the winter months, which often are picked prematurely, resulting in pale, flavorless tomatoes instead of the brightly colored, richly flavored fruit they can be.

As a planner, you can bring seasonality to any event by working with your clients and caterer to create a dining

experience grounded in the seasons, with ingredients, dishes, and beverages that complement the time of year.

Making the world go 'round

Seasonality isn't just a fun theme to try out or a trend to hop on. This practice is actually beneficial in a variety of ways.

For starters, working with the seasons is financially practical, because sourcing local ingredients is an investment into the local economy. **Seasonal ingredients are also less expensive**, since all the same items are harvested and sold

(Clockwise from top right) 🌿 Chowgirls Catering offers a **salad of spring greens and vegetables**. Photo courtesy Becca Dilley
 🍉 This organic vegetable platter by Chowgirls Catering features **autumn and late summer vegetables**, like green beans, squash, and carrots. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz
 🍷 A **watermelon-fennel shrub** is both a refreshing beverage and a great way to serve what's in season! Beverage by Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Sage E Imagery
 🧀 **Cranberry Chèvre Mini Cheesecakes** by Chowgirls Catering uses the flavors of the season. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



FOOD FOR FÊTES



Spiced butternut squash soup with pepita pesto, lime crema, and pomegranate in ceramic pumpkin bowls by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Alison Berner



When nurtured, the relationships between planners and caterers can lead to trust, communication, and smoother selling—a win-win situation! Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



Chowgirls Catering showcased their holiday menu at a tasting event that took place in early August, so they utilized summer produce where winter produce will eventually be. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz

during the same time window, creating a huge supply with decreased prices.

In an article on sustainability for [Catersource magazine](#), Clint Elkins (SB Value) quotes Matt Haggerty (DSquared Catering, Seattle) on the price of in-season items: “Typically, seasonal ingredients are more available so they can be cheaper or easier to find. We currently change our menus four times a year to reflect the season and allow for purchasing power.”

Sarah Kuhlberg (Colette's Catering & Events, Orange County, CA) agrees. “It is important to think about variety and innovation, as eating seasonally encourages diversity in menu options throughout the year,” she told *Special Events*. “This can be exciting for clients and their guests. Inform clients that each season offers its own set of ingredients, allowing for innovative and creative menu planning. Also, seasonal ingredients are usually more abundant and cost-effective. Inform clients that choosing seasonal items can help manage costs while still providing high-quality meals. Caterers can work within budget constraints more effectively this way as well.”

Seasonal items also mean higher quality, especially with produce. When plants can be harvested at their prime and utilized nearly immediately—versus harvesting early, transporting across long distances, and ripening artificially or in stores—they retain freshness and even more nutrients than their off-season counterparts. And on farms where animals



Chowgirls Caterings' Orange-Fennel Chicken Skewers (Larry Schultz organic chicken thigh with ras el hanout spice blend, grilled and tossed with orange-fennel glaze). Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



New York steak with romesco sauce, broccolini, heirloom fingerling potatoes, and chimichurri by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Peterson Design & Photography



A colorful plated brunch course of chive pâte à choux with smoked salmon, lemon crème fraîche, cucumber salad, and fried capers by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Lisette Gatliff

are fed fresh, high-nutrition plants that are in season, the [flavor of the meat](#) tastes better.

Working within the framework of the seasons also has social and environmental benefits, too. When you posit yourself within a network of people in the food system, it's easy to see how many people and places are involved in getting food from the earth to your clients. Instead of working with caterers who use mass-produced food products that remove the visibility of a food item's life cycle, you can form relationships with caterers and local growers and suppliers to create a community where you know exactly where every morsel your clients eat comes from.

"Skip the shipping and handling surcharges and take advantage of your local food scene, including butchers, farmers, beekeepers, brewers, and other specialists," says Elkins. (Read more about caterers who are removing the middleman and working directly with ingredients at their conception in our sister magazine, *Catersource*, at the back of this issue on page 72).

Seasonal, local ingredients also influence cuisine types that can play into personalizing your client's menu. "Highlighting local cuisine with seasonal menus often reflects regional specialties," says Kuhlberg. "Encourage your clients to explore local ingredients, which can add a unique and



FOOD FOR FÊTES

authentic touch to their event. Caterers can create menus that celebrate the area's culinary heritage.”

Finally, the environmentally sustainable benefits of seasonal menus can't be overlooked. Sourcing local food means cutting out long-distance transportation, which greatly reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Local food sourcing also means you can guarantee you're investing in food suppliers who participate in sustainable and regenerative practices.

“It's important to consider environmental responsibility, as eating seasonally aligns with sustainable practices,” says Kuhlberg. “Explain to clients that choosing seasonal foods reduces the carbon footprint and supports local farmers. Many clients value this eco-friendly approach.”

The secret ingredients

Many caterers already work within the seasons whether they advertise it or not, but if you aren't sure, ask your preferred catering partners about where they source food from. You can also partner with caterers who prioritize seasonal menus.

In another article for [Catersource magazine](#), Elkins notes that the key to seasonal is indeed sourcing local. “Embracing seasonality in your menu is best achieved through sourcing ingredients locally. By prioritizing local sourcing, you can ensure you're working with the freshest foods in your region. And since your location plays a significant role in determining what is ‘in season,’ it's essential to curate a menu with dishes that feature local produce and meats.”

A knowledgeable caterer will know exactly what ingredients are in season and create a menu around nature's offerings.

One example of this is Minneapolis-based Chowgirls Catering, who offers seasonal menus, upholding in-season items as the backbone of their catering approach.

Among one of the first “green” caterers in Minnesota, Chowgirls offers a menu for each season. “Many items on our menu are available year-round but feature different seasonal ingredients,” says Mandy Heathcote-Curry, an event specialist for Chowgirls. “For example, our Organic Vegetable Platter is on our menu in all seasons but it features different vegetables depending on the season.

“We do have a couple items that purposefully indicate ‘seasonal’ ingredients, such as our Crostini with Seasonal Toppings, which allows us to use ingredients we have in house and that helps us to avoid food waste,” Heathcote-Curry adds.

“Of course, sourcing locally means you'll need to familiarize yourself with seasonal availability in your region and plan your menus accordingly,” says Elkins. “It might mean your strawberry cobbler becomes a rhubarb cobbler in the [spring], but the benefits of seasonal menus are worth the flexibility.”

Chowgirls' menus do this by offering mini quiches all year round, with seasonal veggies and local cheese. Dishes like pies and galettes that can be filled with whatever is in season are easy ways to highlight seasonal ingredients, too (turn to page

30 in *Catersource* at the end of this issue for a deep dive into the versatility of pie).

The Chowgirls website also provides [a calendar of what is in season](#) at any given point in the year. You'll see things like asparagus, peas, and ramps in the spring versus beets, Brussels sprouts, and winter squash in fall. They also make note of what to avoid: summer squash and tomatoes in spring, for instance, and asparagus and corn on the cob in fall.

Meat and seafood can also be featured based on seasonality.

In an article for the *Huffington Post*, Terry Ragasa of Sutter Meats explains how the symbiosis of animals and plants is affected by the seasons. “Before refrigeration, people would slaughter hogs around fall because they were eating apples and acorns that would fall on the ground. They'd let them hang over the winter, hams would be ready by Easter. But now, pigs are pretty hearty, farmers have them in and out and they can be eaten anytime. But there is a different flavor in the meat depending on the season.”

Kuhlberg notes that seasonality looks a little different with meat than with produce. “While the concept of ‘seasonality’ might not apply to meats in the same way it does to fruits and vegetables, there are still some factors to consider when it comes to the availability and optimal times to serve different types of meat. At Colette's Catering & Events, we always look to local farms and purveyors when it comes to seasonality and availability.”

Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events and Naked Fig Catering) says that meat's seasonality depends more on the type of meat and how it's prepared. “What we find is that during the warmer months, our clients like to eat lighter meals that don't include heavy meats. We also see that as the late fall and early winter approach, our clients are craving the heartier and heavier, saucier meats, like short ribs.”

Kuhlberg agrees. “While beef is available year-round, hearty and rich cuts like roasts and short ribs are often associated with the cooler months. Grilling cuts like steaks and burgers are typically popular during the warmer months.” The same goes for chicken.

Certain meats are most popular in spring. “Pork, including ham, doesn't have a distinct ‘season’; however, ham is often associated with spring,” she says. “Spring lamb is a term used to describe young lamb that is available in the spring months, usually March to May.” However, “lamb cuts can still be enjoyed year-round, with heartier preparations like stews being more common in the colder months.”

Seafood is more affected by seasonality than livestock, says Kuhlberg. “Seafood can be influenced by both seasonality and [sustainability](#). Certain types of seafood, like shellfish and certain fish species, have peak seasons when they are most abundant and flavorful. It's also crucial to consider sustainable seafood practices and make choices that support responsible fishing and aquaculture.”



Chowgirls Catering's whipped organic mashed potatoes loaded with Hope Creamery butter and local cream, topped with caviar and crème fraîche. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



Dolmades (vegan Greek-style stuffed grape leaves with rice, pine nuts, fresh mint, lemon zest, and golden raisins) from Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



You don't have to sell your clients on ingredients alone. When you work with a quality caterer, you know your event will have great flavors regardless of the season. Spread by Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



Chowgirls Catering offers Crostinis with Seasonal Toppings: at a tasting event in August, the topping was Saffron Tomato Jam & Chevre (whipped chèvre, saffron tomato jam, and sautéed organic spinach). Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



The Cornelius Pasta Bite from Chowgirls Catering is a stunning, delicious striped ravioli, hand-crafted locally by Cornelius Pasta Co. and filled with camembert cheese and cranberry in a lemon butter sauce. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz



A Touch of Seasonal Décor

There are ways to use the seasons to your advantage in decorating as well—ways that don't necessarily have to be "season-themed."

One of the easiest ways to do this is to use florals that are in season (which comes down to whatever is in season in your event's location). By working with flowers and greenery that are at their peak, you can channel seasonal sentiment, work with local suppliers and cheaper prices, and create a sense of connection to nature. For example, use greens and bulb flowers like daffodils and tulips in spring, or evergreen branches and poinsettias in winter. Your event doesn't need to be fall-themed but can certainly use colorful leaves and asters to enliven the event space.

Use colors that are found out your window for menus, chargers, and linens. Even the stationery can replicate plants that are in season through the use of illustrations and dried florals.

Another way to embrace the seasons is to use scented candles or incense that reflects the time of year. Nature can be one of the best sources of inspiration for planners!

(Above) A winter-inspired tablescape by Chowgirls Catering, using evergreen and birch branches. Chowgirls' winter menu runs from November through March. Photo courtesy Lucas Botz

Flavors of the seasons

Seasonal menus also dial into the different associations and cravings of each time of year. While the seasons certainly differ depending on location, Kuhlberg and Selden share their favorites for each of nature's turns.

Spring

"In springtime, I suggest offering dishes that are light and fresh," says Kuhlberg. "Consider favorites like lemon herb chicken and salads that feature those crisp spring greens and juicy strawberries. Add a pop of seasonal joy with peas, radishes, and fragrant herbs."

Another green to include is asparagus, which is "just so perfect when in season and can be used in so many ways, from a decadent asparagus risotto or even just grilled to perfection," says Selden. "I also love to shave them into a salad."

As for spring beverages, think light, fruity, and floral: Selden recommends beverages like Aperol spritzes, mojitos, gin and elderflower or cucumber cocktails, lemonade, and iced tea.

"Consider serving up sparkling rosé, spa water infused with fresh fruit, and elegant floral cocktails like elderflower spritzers," suggests Kuhlberg.

Summer

"For summer, I feel like it goes without saying that anything grilled" is ideal for Selden. "Peaches, heirloom tomatoes, fresh corn, and watermelon in salads or straight up as dessert all remind me of a great summer meal." She also says of clients: "They tend to lean towards menus that often don't even include a starch, as the veggies are so delicious and fresh at that time of year that they don't miss the potatoes."

Kuhlberg agrees that the right seasonal choices help balance the season's heat. "When summer comes around, your menu can reflect that with cool choices like chilled tomato gazpacho, grilled seafood, and barbecue chicken."

The fruity floral beverages of spring work for summer, too. "Summertime refreshments like tropical iced teas and lemonades and fruity margaritas are total winners. You can also bring in the summer vibes with classic mojitos and sangrias," recommends Kuhlberg.

Fall

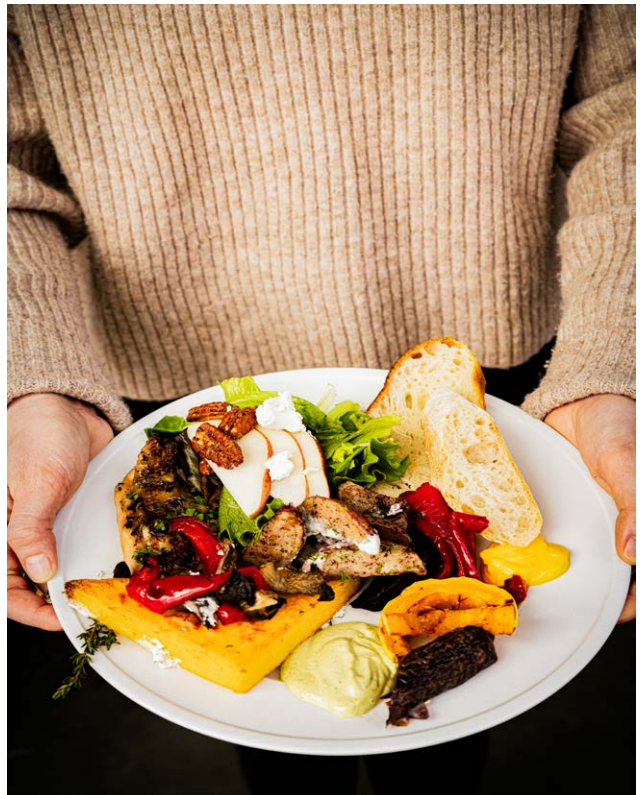
As the temperature cools off, cravings turn toward heavier meals and reflect the change in seasonal produce.

"Autumn is the time to celebrate the harvest season," Kuhlberg reminds us. "Think about comforting pasta ragu, herbed turkey roasted to perfection, sweet potato gnocchi, and apple-cinnamon desserts that capture the essence of fall."

Selden agrees. "I think of anything with apples, pumpkin, or butternut squash. I love our butternut squash crumble as a great hearty side dish for things like pork or turkey."



Nothing says summer like this field greens and fruit salad from Chowgirls Catering. Photo courtesy Andy Berndt



From mid-November to March in Minnesota, Chowgirls Catering pulls from in-season produce to make this winter family-style dinner. Photo courtesy Amy Diep



In the spirit of spring, Chowgirls Catering makes a green gazpacho, offered April through June. Photo courtesy Becca Dilley

Beverages this time of year become things of comfort as well. “Again, in the fall—especially in the Northeast—I’d go back to the apples and say apple cider or mulled apple cider as it gets colder,” says Selden, “as well as mulled wine, which is so delish!”

Kuhlberg adds spiced chai to the list of comforting drinks. She adds: “Embrace the rich flavors of fall with apple brandy sidecars and Old Fashioned cocktails.”

Winter

Winter is the time for the heartiest, warmest nostalgic flavors.

“As the weather in the Northeast gets cooler, I often turn to hearty soups or chili, as it is so comforting,” says Selden. “Our clients love braised, slow-roasted comfort foods in the fall and winter season, too.”

Kuhlberg recommends warming, grounding foods as well. “When the chill sets in for winter, think about hearty options like beef stew, winter squash soup that warms the soul, and those roasted meats that everyone loves. Don’t forget those comforting sides like roasted root veggies, mashed potatoes, and rich, flavorful au jus.”

Winter beverages are also all about warming and heartiness. “When it’s frosty outside, warm everyone up with classics like mulled wine, hot cocoa stations, and pomegranate martinis,” suggests Kuhlberg.



FOOD FOR FÊTES



Watermelon salad with arugula, cucumber, heirloom tomato, red onion, marinated feta, and red wine and oregano vinaigrette by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Catherine Chuang



A medley of signature spring cocktails that includes a Tuscan Spritz, a Grapefruit Tonic, and a Blood Orange Martini, by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Kate Noelle



Summer fruit and cheese platter by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Lisette Gatliff

Don't forget about holiday traditions, either. "Winter screams eggnog, especially around the holidays," says Selden. "Anything with bourbon like a killer Old Fashioned always is a popular choice."

An act of collaboration

Working with your caterer to create a menu that's in season is beneficial not only to our world but to your brand—you can utilize this community and your place as a planner to portray yourself as an expert on the menu and as a high-quality event producer.

Using fresher, local food ingredients that are at their peak in nutrients and flavor will only reflect your ability to provide a quality dining experience for your clients and to keep up with the demand for local, sustainable dining. "Advise your clients that incorporating these ingredients enhances the overall dining experience. They can expect vibrant colors, better taste, and a connection to the time of year," recommends Kuhlberg.

As a planner, you can use your network with knowledgeable caterers to portray yourself as an industry expert who is in touch with the nuances of the food system and as a provider of first-rate event production.

"When event planners collaborate with caterers on menu planning, understanding the principles of eating seasonally and creating seasonal menus can lead to effective communication with clients and a smoother planning process," Kuhlberg continues.

Finding an educated caterer makes the selling process easier as well. "We work with several vendors that know Chowgirls well and they sell their clients on our expertise in events, quality, presentation, hospitality, and our respect for the planet," says Heathcote-Curry. "If there are planners we haven't had the opportunity to work with yet, we gladly educate them and their clients on our seasonal menus and sustainable practices!"

You don't have to subject your clients (or yourself) to a college course's worth of knowledge, however. In some ways, building the right relationships means your clients trust you and the caterer to create the best food for their event, regardless of how much they know about the seasons. In fact, Chowgirls makes sure to nurture relationships by hosting tasting events throughout the year, where they educate event planners and vendor partners on seasonality and showcase new menus.

Since these tastings often embrace different seasons than when they take place, they focus more on showcasing the flavor profiles and composition of the menu items rather than specific ingredients themselves. *Special Events* attended their most recent tasting, a winter holiday menu reveal that took place in August. While some dishes contained

summer produce, the catering company used the event to introduce new menu offerings and build relationships while demonstrating the quality of the food, regardless of the seasonal produce featured.

“Our menus are very transparent, highlighting the ingredients that are available in that season,” says Heathcote-Curry. “We find when we give examples of what this menu item has featured in that season, most clients don’t mind not knowing the exact ingredients! We love that our clients trust us in our quality and presentation, and the majority love learning about our efforts as a sustainable company. We always ask clients if there are any food allergies or dietary preferences so we make sure to avoid sending them a seasonal ingredient they don’t like or can’t eat.”

Whether you are working with your favorite caterers or with a venue that has a preferred caterer, begin by asking questions and having a conversation to learn how they source their ingredients and whether they stick with what is in season or if they transport out-of-season food items from different climates. Once you know how they work, you can begin either learning more about their sourcing and work with them to better sell in-season menus to clients, or if they don’t already practice this seasonality, discern whether they are open to learning, or else seek out caterers who value this approach.

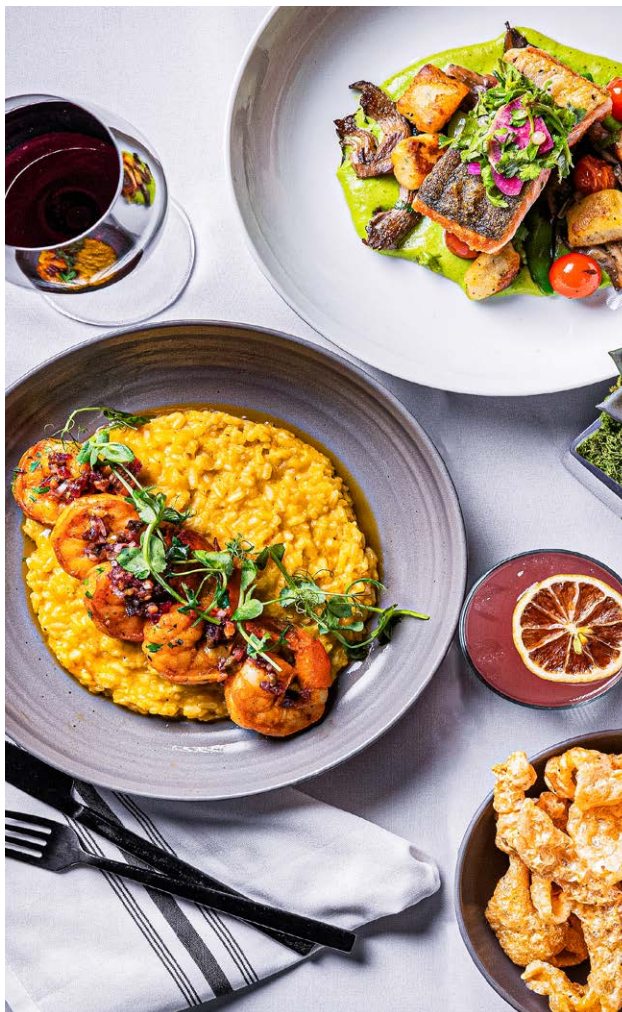
“My best piece of advice is to bring the catering partner in for the conversations regarding the menu,” says Selden. “Even go as far to let them lead that conversation and really take the time to get to know the client, understand what they love, the restaurants that they enjoy, the places that they travel, get to know their favorite (and least favorite) foods so that when they provide a proposal, they are able to customize the menu to suit the client and also to represent their brand well.”

This is where collaboration is key: as planner, you have a lot of information that can assist in these conversations. In her keynote speech at Catersource + The Special Event this past March, event pro Marcy Blum (Marcy Blum Associates) told the crowd, “We are the gatekeepers. We are able to give [the caterer] clues and tricks and insight they wouldn’t get otherwise; I can upsell things so much easier to a client because I’ve basically been living with them.” When both you and your catering team are on the same page and understand the client well, the menu will come together smoothly.

“By familiarizing themselves with the benefits and considerations of seasonal menus, event planners can effectively communicate the advantages to their clients,” Kuhlberg emphasizes. “Collaborating closely with caterers ensures that the culinary aspect of the event is aligned with the overall vision, resulting in a memorable and satisfying experience for all involved.” ●



Fresh summery raspberry gelée and white chocolate panna cotta by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Peterson Design & Photography



A lovely spread of crispy skin salmon, shrimp risotto, and chicharrones for dinner by Colette's Catering & Events. Photo courtesy Sarah King Photography

CONFETTI

Events Worth *Exalting*

A look at the 2023 Gala Award finalists and the inspiring award ceremony

by Amanda Nicklaus

Each year, *Special Events* magazine receives entries from event designers and producers across the globe, detailing their most spectacular events of the year in hopes of being bestowed a coveted Gala Award.

The Gala awards honor events in a variety of categories such as “Best Entertainment,” “Best Fundraising or Nonprofit Event,” and “Designer of the Year.” This year’s

award ceremony was celebrated in March as part of Catersource + The Special Event, in conjunction with Catersource’s ACE awards and ICA’s CATIE awards. The evening began with a cocktail reception for nominees and was kicked off by a spectacular performance by Metropolis Productions.

Veteran planner Michael Cerbelli (president & CEO, Cerbelli Creative) opened the affair with a short keynote speech, and then: the moment everyone was waiting for—the naming of the 2023 award recipients.

Let’s take a look at these inspirational event designs.



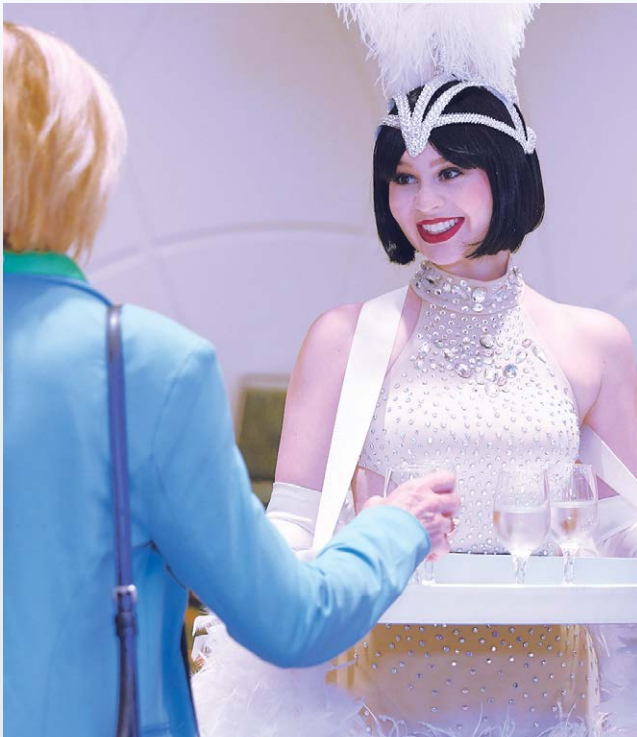
Scott Frankel (Animatic Media) poses with **Ashleigh Morriss** and **Joelle Paleologou** (Peace Arch Hospital Foundation) as they receive the **Gala Award for Best Fundraising or Non-Profit Event** for their event, "La Dolce Vita." Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Robin Selden (Marcia Selden Catering & Events) gives **Kristin Banta** (Kristin Banta Events) the **Gala Award for Designer of the Year**. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Industry veteran and 2023 Special Events Lifetime Achievement Award recipient **Michael Cerbelli** (Cerbelli Creative) kicked off the event with a keynote address. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



Award nominees mingled at a cocktail reception before the ceremony. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



2023 Awards ceremony attendees were treated to pre-ceremony live entertainment like this tap dancer. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos



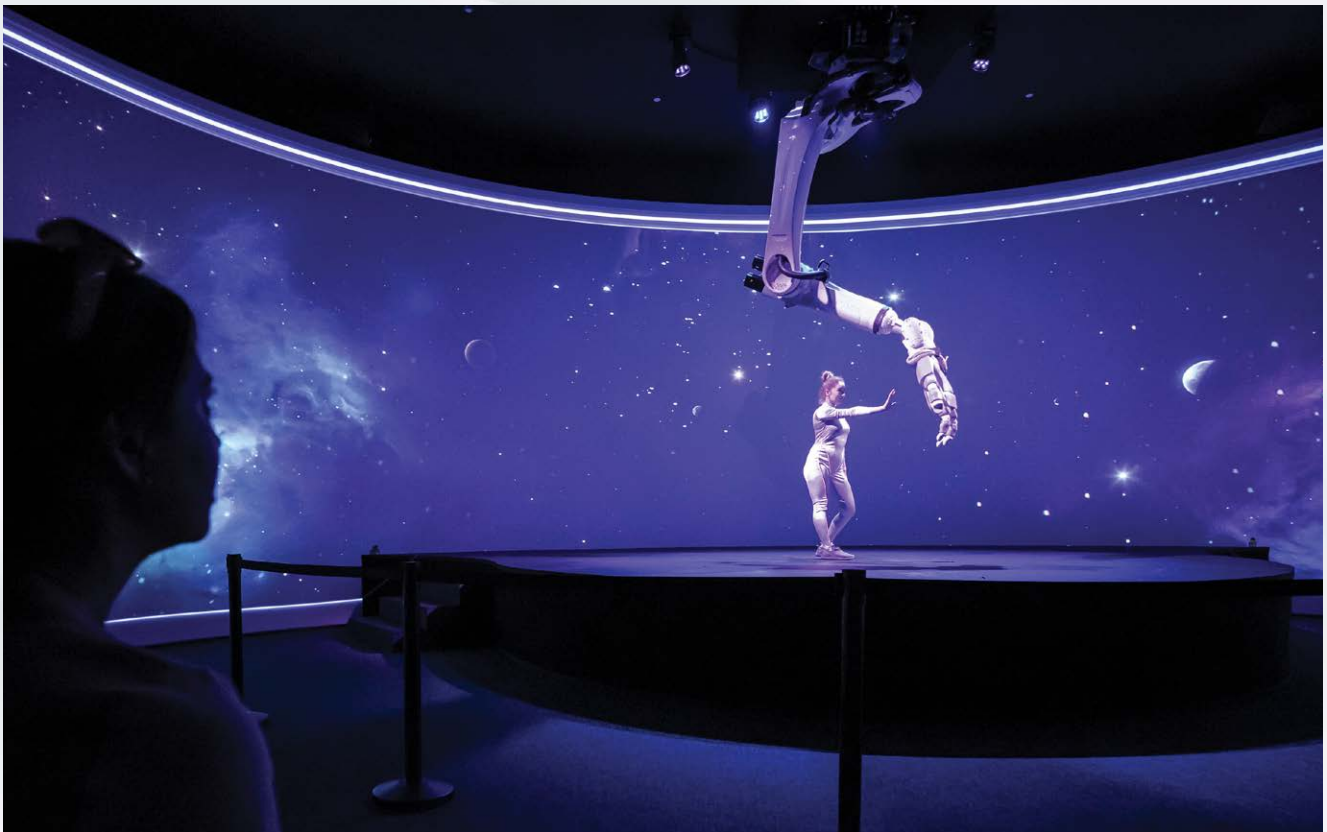
Metropolis Productions put on a dazzling opening act to hype up the crowd at this year's ACE, Gala, and CATIE award ceremony in Orlando. Photo courtesy WASIO Faces/SpotMyPhotos

BEST ENTERTAINMENT: insglück, “Unlimited Space”

Insglück dazzled the audience at the Kazakhstan exhibit at the World Expo 2022 by making an automotive robot interact with a human counterpart in real time. They made sure there was precise synchronization and a seamless connection to the media, programming a robotic hand to an interface. In a 270-degree immersive simulation, the audience joined this imaginary science fiction world and watched as the robot and human danced together, exploring the theme of human and AI collaboration.



The Main Show at the Kazakhstan Pavilion Expo 2020, called “Unlimited Space,” communicated a message of hope about the future of humans and technology. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



The Main Show performance consisted of a high-tech show and an acrobatic interaction with a KUKA KR 240, showing the synergy between a human and a robot. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller

BEST EVENT FOR A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL: Star Trax Events, “Take Over The Night”

How do you come up with a new, unusual, and exciting Mitzvah, when clients attend the same celebrations throughout the year for their friends and family? Star Trax Events did just that by incorporating the Bar Mitzvah boy into the custom content throughout the evening: a green screen video shoot honoring him, a kid’s soda bar with custom Jones soda bottles, highlighted initials with different sayings and neon signage, a custom 3-D photo backdrop, and custom menus.



Many aspects of the “Take Over The Night” Bar Mitzvah were customized to create a theme around the honoree, like these soda bottles featuring his photo. Photo courtesy Justin Munter Photography



An electric blue color scheme was elevated using custom glassware and blue florals. Photo courtesy Justin Munter Photography

BEST EVENT PRODUCED FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION:
Lenny Talarico Events and Cerbelli Creative, “The INTREPID Celebration”

Hosting a reception for 2,200 employees on a museum/event venue WW2 aircraft carrier in New York comes with its fair share of challenges, but that didn’t stop Lenny Talarico Events and Cerbelli Creative from planning a spectacular event. The two teams

(who met at The Special Event years ago!) collaborated to create the Spanish insurance company MAPFRE’s 50th annual incentive event on the historic Intrepid landmark, using a “100 Years of New York” theme to celebrate the decades.



The venue for “The INTREPID Celebration” is part of the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, located in a WW2 aircraft carrier. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra



A “100 Years of New York” theme was executed through atmosphere talent dressed in costume from the decades, like this 80s room which also featured music from the time. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra



The celebrated decades went back to the 1920s, where atmosphere talent dressed as flappers and bootleggers greeted guests. Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra

BEST FUNDRAISING OR NON-PROFIT EVENT: Peace Arch Hospital Foundation, “La Dolce Vita”

Known for their well-produced themes, this year’s fundraiser was themed “La Dolce Vita” and mimicked the cozy atmosphere of a small Italian village to create a sense of connection and warmth among attendees. This was created through details including: a 14-foot sprawling tree above the dining tables to emulate an Italian garden; a “House of Gucci”

activation where a fashion illustrator drew custom sketches for attendees; a café with an espresso bar and gelato; a three-wheeled Piaggio Ape Van imported from Italy that acted as a mobile wine-and-bubbles bar; a 24-foot charcuterie table; living Renaissance-style statues; and a wine raffle. Peace Arch Hospital Foundation raised well over \$900,000—a success for all!



Attendees of “La Dolce Vita” were greeted by a chef station serving risotto from a giant parmesan wheel. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy



Peace Arch Hospital Foundation partnered with local business Paintertainment to create multiple living statues, including this one which resembled a water fountain whose tablescap attached to her dress, where she offered signature Negronis for attendees to enjoy. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy



The Cara Mia Caffe featured an espresso bar and a gelato station for attendees to enjoy, making them feel like they had stepped into an Italian village. Photo courtesy Brian Dennehy

BEST MULTIPLE-DAY EVENT PROGRAM FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION:
Steve Levine Entertainment, “Chandler Chamber Ostrich Festival 2022”

Steve Levine Entertainment (SLE) expanded this annual festival to be two weekends instead of one, allowing for a jam-packed entertainment lineup with well-loved artists. SLE also made the transition to using radio-frequency identification (RFID) wristbands to create a fully integrated cashless event for the first time. The

new tech came with its fair share of issues, but SLE managed to troubleshoot successfully, and the implementation of the RFID wristbands resulted in an increase in sales and in-depth attendee demographics. After cancelling the 2020 event, the festival came back stronger than ever in 2022.



The fairgrounds were crowded with people excited to come back after the pandemic pause, making it the largest-scale event that the Steve Levine Entertainment team has ever produced. Photo courtesy @oakimagery



The Ostrich Festival featured several carnival attractions, like duck racing, a Ferris wheel, and fishing for prizes (shown here). Photo courtesy @oakimagery



This year's festival had a killer entertainment lineup, with big stars like Flo Rida (shown here), The Beach Boys, the Four Tops, The Temptations, Nelly, Walker Hayes, Uncle Kracker, The Band Perry, and more. Photo courtesy @oakimagery



The Ostrich Festival is based on the history of ostrich ranching in Chandler, AZ. Ostriches roam the festival freely (in a designated area) and are celebrated by all! Photo courtesy @oakimagery

MOST OUTSTANDING SPECTACLE, FAIR, OR FESTIVAL: insglück, “Gateway to Tomorrow”

The Kazakhstan Pavilion: Gateway to Tomorrow, built using lightweight construction and the use of composite building materials and nearly 100% recyclable steel, took World Expo guests through a tour of Kazakhstan’s past, present, and future, each

featured on a different level. This included the “Great Steppe” grasslands of the past, mixed media presentations of modern-day Kazakhstan, and a spaceship-like future area featuring a robotics main show (which received the above Gala Award for Best Entertainment).



Visitors could view a mixed media presentation of the present-day Nur-Sultan city that brought the essence of Eurasia to life. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



The Kazakhstan Pavilion was designed with Kazakhstan’s traditional architecture and cultural heritage. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



The lower main area represented Kazakhstan’s past and featured a multi-sensory installation showcasing the country’s rich natural environments, biodiversity, and cultural heritage. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller



In the “Future Now” area, visitors got to see an impressive interactive table informing them about the country’s future initiatives and challenges. Photo courtesy Andreas Keller

BEST WEDDING: Jaclyn Watson Events, “Green Envy”

The Jaclyn Watson Events (JWE) team created a beautiful wedding whose color scheme mirrored the Vermont landscape where it took place. Various shades and textures, along with accents of gold and light purple, blended with the property’s deep greens and stone greys. Florals were a focus for this look, with soft white chiffon draping and unique white

branch chandeliers adorning the dreamy tent ceiling. The tabletop setting included matte grey plates and gold flatware, green carousel glassware, and custom sage green menus tucked in light linen napkins. JWE worked with as many local vendors as possible, including a local honey maker (in place of traditional Vermont maple syrup). Green never looked so good!



A flowing sailcloth tent was accented by antler chandeliers and green florals, glassware, and linens. Photo courtesy Kelsey Regan Photography



A mixture of dark farm and linen tables blended with the natural Vermont environment to create the “Green Envy” look. The linens were a vibrant pop of green with a floral inlay, along with stunning see-through white floral runners. Photo courtesy Kelsey Regan Photography

The time is now to enter the 2024 Galas!

To submit an entry to this year’s Gala awards, please visit our [awards portal](#).

Important Dates

- **September 1, 2022–September, 30, 2023** | Eligibility Period for Entries
- **Sunday, October 15, 2023** | Regular submission deadline (\$99 fee)
- **Tuesday, October 31, 2023** | Late Bird submission deadline (\$160 fee)

If you are interested in entering in the ACE awards instead, you can enter the Catersource 2024 ACE awards in the same [online portal](#) as the Gala awards. [Catersource + The Special Event](#) will be held February 12-15, 2024 in Austin, TX. Both the ACE and Gala awards will be presented during the conference at a to-be-determined location in Austin on closing night, February 15th, during a ceremony that also includes lifetime achievement and volunteerism awards.

DESIGNER OF THE YEAR: Kristin Banta, Kristin Banta Events

Kristin Banta has been an innovator for over twenty years, setting the standard for high-end events. At the cutting edge of the latest trends in décor, catering, and entertainment, she takes the client's vision to an epic new level, orchestrating truly original celebrations in locations worldwide that are provocative and

impact all senses, telling a distinct story to each and every guest. She's known for her ability to completely transform spaces into immersive, interactive, and exploratory environments for attendees, always with fresh content that is multi-dimensional and memorable. ●



Kristin Banta Events' "Grand Slam Mitzvah" featured a fashion-forward baseball-themed approach that offered adults a place to be seated for dinner. This tablescape featured an installation of baseballs and baseball mitts with phalaenopsis florals. Photo courtesy Katie Edwards Photography



For ELLE's 2022 Women in Hollywood, guests were seated at round black acrylic tables featuring a sleek and sophisticated design, which included a trio of white calla lily arrangements, white dinner plates with black rims, and white linen hemstitched napkins, set with black chameleon chairs with velvet backings. Photo courtesy Kristin Banta Events



A fashion runway-inspired setting where one ceremony at Mizel Estate took place, featuring smoke acrylic chairs flanking a mirrored aisle and lush overgrown florals dressing either side of the path. Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography



One of Banta's designs included multiple types of seating, like this table with brushed gold chairs, pink and green table elements, and crystal accents throughout the room. Photo courtesy John and Joseph Photography