

The Family Recipe

WE DISH WHY THESE MULTIGENERATIONAL CATERING COMPANIES ARE SERVING UP SUCCESS.

By Esther Lee



What involves family, food and an entire finance team? In weddings, the answer is a multigenerational catering company. The term “cater” is derived from the Old French word “acateur,” or “buyer,” which traces back to the late 16th century. The concept of catering is several millennia older: The practice originated in ancient China and Egypt. Such civilizations were especially familial, with social status and vocation customarily

passed from one generation to the next. Today, following in your parents’ footsteps is a choice. We dive into the at-home and in-office dynamics of multigenerational wedding caterers. Their stories take the cake: Each spans decades of hard work and shows the importance of instilling family values. And if that wasn’t enough, the caterers share a few trends you’re about to see (and consume!) at receptions everywhere.

Marcia Selden Catering **NEW YORK CITY**

Robin Selden, *Managing partner and executive chef*

Jeffrey Selden, *Managing partner*

Marcia Selden, *Founder and president*

As a teenager in the ’80s, Robin Selden watched her mother, Marcia Selden, build a catering business from the ground up. “She was inspired by another caterer up the street whom you may know—Martha Stewart—and told my dad that she wanted to be a caterer, as she was known for her

extravagant parties at home,” says Robin. “My brother and I saw the business being built one phyllo hot dog at a time, which was her signature hors d’oeuvre stuffed with sauerkraut and mustard. Mom’s business was strictly built by word of mouth, and her clients were happy to sing her praises. Today, the children of those patrons are hiring us too.”

On the cusp of the new millennium, Marcia needed help...a lot of it. “The business was exploding at the seams,” Robin adds. Back then, both Robin and her brother, Jeffrey, had established corporate ca-

reers. “Jeffrey was on the fast track in the luxury hotel world and I, frankly, hated my job,” says Robin. “I figured I had nothing to lose. As long as we didn’t kill each other, I thought it could be a recipe for success.”

Together, the Selden women expanded the company’s operations to a large office and commissary kitchen. Twelve years and many weekend weddings later, Jeffrey—then the director of food and beverage at New York City’s Palace Hotel—decided it was time to join the family business. “He was creating over-the-top events and weddings for New York society and building his



relationships with the industry’s top planners and vendors,” boasts Robin. “While we’d been working for years in New York, having Jeffrey on the team really helped to bring us to the forefront.”

How catering has evolved over time...

“When I started working with my mom, she was creating stunning handwritten catering proposals that would take hours to write,” says Robin, who later introduced computer systems to the operations to streamline productivity. “Through the last 25 years, we’ve seen innovation and creativity come alive. From PowerPoint to Canva, the possibilities are endless. The days of hand-writing our prep lists are gone, thank goodness, as they used to take me hours to create. From a chef’s perspective, I also cannot express how much technology has helped us bolster our business.”

What we love about the family business is...

“It’s special to watch your mother be an entrepreneur before the word was even a thing,” says Robin. “And it’s a dream to see her build something and then continue her legacy. We love being together, so it’s a gift to work in sync and create delicious memories for our clients.” Sometimes Robin’s and Jeffrey’s kids pitch in. “My twins just graduated from college and both have said that they still want to help on weekends and nights when they can,” she adds. “They love being a part of the company, and they love the work. As a mom and business owner, it’s all you could ever want.”

As for Marcia, the matriarch? “When I ran this question by her, she said that she couldn’t be prouder to see her children take what she worked so hard to build and bring it to another level,” says Robin. “She used to dream that we would be as passionate about Marcia Selden Catering as she was. She built a business that values family and treats our team—the heartbeat of our company—like family too. You can’t do that in the corporate world.”



Beets Hospitality Group LIVERMORE, CA

Read Phillips, Founder and co-owner
George Phillips IV, CEO and co-owner

Thirty-eight years ago, Read Phillips

started Beets Catering out of her garage in California. And there is, of course, an entire tale that led to this decision. “Upon graduating college, I got a job in La Paz, Bolivia, at the first five-star hotel in the country. The owner was an American married to a Bolivian, and he suggested that if I wanted a career in hospitality, I should go to a trade school like the Culinary Institute of America (CIA).” (Back then, Read’s only pro cooking experience was a high school fast-food job.) At the CIA, she learned

that it’s easier to find success in the field if the business is predictable. “That’s why I chose catering: I know the date of the event, the number of guests and what they’ve selected to eat. In restaurants, this isn’t always the case.”

Eventually, the company renamed to Beets Hospitality Group and moved from the garage to a venue with a commercial kitchen. “The concept of exclusive venues was new in the catering industry,” says Read. “We went on to build two venues in Livermore wine country on vineyard estates.” Read’s husband, George Phillips III, an architect, made it possible. “Without him, I don’t know if I would’ve had the confidence to build two 20,000-square-foot event spaces,” she says. “Our son, George

IV, grew up in the business, washing dishes and loading trucks in high school. But he didn’t have much interest in joining the company.”

George IV confirms that statement. “Out of college, I landed a dream job working for a local nonprofit focused on land preservation,” he says. “Then my mom called me out of the blue and asked if I had any interest in taking a seven-month trip together. We called it ‘Hospitality Round the World,’ taking culinary excursions through countries like Lebanon, Sudan, Indonesia and Israel, through the lens of hospitality.” During those transformative experiences, he decided it was time to join Beets. “I was thrilled to have him,” Read says.

How catering has evolved over time...

Once George IV signed on, he immediately noticed ways to streamline efficiencies. “At 73, I was not going to be the future of our business,” says Read. “I’ve surrounded myself with smart young people and respect the direction they are taking the company. I have, in fact, backed away from daily engagement.” Incorporating technology has greatly benefitted the business.



“From delivering quotes and proposals to scheduling tours, it’s streamlined our processes,” says Read. “And social media: that was all new.” Thankfully, George knew exactly where to lean in.

What we love about the family business is...

“I happen to like my son a lot. We are good friends, so to have him at the helm of Beets makes me proud. That’s on the personal level,” says Read. “Catering is complicated. There are endless moving pieces leading up to and executing an event. If a family member has a necessary skill, it’s wonderful to include them. On the professional level, every company needs fresh young eyes to identify opportunities and lead change. It’s not always easy for the old dogs to stand down, but this younger generation is smart and organized.”

Footers Catering DENVER

Anthony Lambatos, Co-owner
April Lambatos, Co-owner

The story of this company began in 1977, when Jimmy Lambatos started Footers restaurant. Four years later, he expanded to catering. “His whole goal was to bring restaurant-quality food and service to catered events, and that is something we still pride ourselves on today,” says Jimmy’s son, Anthony Lambatos, who’s now the co-owner of Footers Catering. “When my dad and his partner split in the early 1990s, the restaurant closed, but my dad continued the catering business.”

Growing up, Jimmy worked for his dad on weekends and in the summer. “I said I never wanted a career in the industry,” he says. “Catering was my dad’s thing, and I wanted to be a pro basketball player or something in sports.” But in 2004, Anthony’s got his first full-time job after college at Footers. “I spent five years doing almost every job in the company, trying to help my dad put systems in place to improve efficiencies. It was extremely difficult working with him at that time,” Anthony admits. “I was too young and arrogant to appreciate what he went through to build a busi-



ness from scratch, and he was too old and stubborn to be open to my ideas and change the ways he’d always done things. Most days I was pretty miserable and questioned why I had chosen this path.”

Close to quitting, the then 27-year-old Anthony had breakfast with his college mentor and lamented that he was “missing” his calling in life as a college basketball coach. When asked why he felt that way, Anthony rattled off the reasons: a love for competition, strategy, collaboration across various types of personalities, developing the skills

Mintahoe Catering & Events MINNEAPOLIS

Jim McMerty, Founder
Suzi McMerty Shands, Co-president
Shawn McMerty, Co-president

Jim McMerty was a CPA first, but his work with small businesses was what led him to the world of weddings. In 1992, Jim was helping a local company, Twin City Catering, with its accounting when the owner offered to sell it his way. “The business started in a small storefront in North Minneapolis with one van,” says Jim’s daughter Suzi. While she was studying psychology in grad school, Jim simultaneously asked Suzi to take care of administrative tasks at the catering company. It eventually turned into a sales role. As time went on, Twin City Catering grew through various means (namely “partnerships, acquisitions and an increased focus on sales,” she says). In 2008, TCC purchased a company

called Mintahoe Hospitality, and they became Mintahoe Catering & Events. As fate would have it, Suzi’s brother Shawn had been working at an investment fund, and after the 2008 financial crisis, he decided to enter the family business too, joining for good in 2012.

Today, the McMertys are a family team: Jim is the CEO, while Suzi and Shawn serve as co-presidents. “Working with family has its positives and negatives,” all three admit. “Being able to work with parents, siblings and children gives you a whole new perspective about family dynamics. It is difficult at times to separate the personal family relationships from the professional company relationship.”

But there’s an upside to it all: “It gives you a better sense of closeness and togetherness. We love being able to come into work each day and see each other and be involved in each other’s lives, not just at holidays and special occasions,” they share.

Why we love weddings...

“Hospitality, and catering in particular, is a fabulous business, because you get to help couples plan their most important day and see their dreams come true,” says Suzi. “I love creating an interactive experience for guests, something that will get them away from sitting with the same six people at a table. One of my favorites is a ‘performance station’ where chefs get creative in culinary presentation.”



of team members and much more. “After patiently listening to my animated response, he peered through his thin-rimmed glasses and said, ‘Anthony, you have an opportunity to do all of that right now at Footers.’ It was a moment that changed the course of my career. I went from seeing no future at Footers to loving my job.”

In 2010, nearly 35 years after Jimmy had established Footers Restaurant, Anthony and his wife, April, purchased the business from him. “We have successfully made the transition to a second-generation family-owned business and are very fortunate to be where we are today,” Anthony says. “Since the purchase, we have significantly increased revenue, drastically decreased turnover and have twice expanded into larger locations, doubling our physical footprint each time.” The couple has now established multiple sister companies, including MIBE (Make It Better Every day), which helps improve the culture of hospitality businesses, and their own event venue, Social Capitol. “We are not interested in growth for growth’s sake, but rather, we want to make sure we’re pursuing paths that excite our team and are true to our mission and values,” says Anthony.

What we love about the family business is...

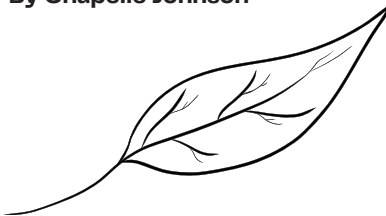
“When people tell us they can’t imagine working with their significant other, we reply that we can’t imagine *not* working with each other,” the Lambatoses say. (Fun fact: Anthony tried to hire April before they started dating.) “Her love of food, events and operations, paired with my love of business, make for a great partnership,” he says. More importantly, it sets the tone for the entire team. “Having someone you respect and trust wholeheartedly as a partner is special and rewarding,” Anthony adds. “Our focus on different areas of the business has allowed us to both shine without stepping on each other’s toes.”

Despite the ups and downs of working with his father, Anthony looks back on the founding of Footers with much gratitude. The couple established an annual core value awards called the “Jimmy Buck” recognition program to shape the corporate culture of Footers. “We had the opportunity to take what he built and transform it into what it is today,” says Anthony. “We are proud of our history and want to honor the legacy of the business, while making sure it evolves and can last for generations to come.”

What’s Cookin’

CONSIDER THESE INNOVATIVE AND FRESHLY HARVESTED WEDDING CATERING TRENDS OF 2025, PLANTED BY A TOP ROSTER OF CULINARY AND DRINK EXPERTS.

By **Chapelle Johnson**



Invest in Environmentally Friendly Catering

Environmental awareness is a hot topic that some might argue isn’t even a trend. “Everyone in the industry is catching up to the concerns of Gen Z and rising to the occasion with eco-fabulous event options,” says Corina Beczner, owner of Vibrant Events in San Francisco. This could range from zero-waste meals to recyclable utensils and dinnerware. Adds Read Phillips from Beets Hospitality Group in Livermore, California: “We use only china and glassware in our service.”

Serve Fun Preceremony Drinks

Serving preceremony drinks (alcoholic or not) promotes a chill vibe and cools guests before outdoor ceremonies. “This trend will persist as couples recognize the benefits of creating a relaxed and convivial atmosphere. It also allows guests to mingle and enjoy the surroundings before the formalities begin,” says Kim Hanks, co-owner of Camp Lucy in Dripping Springs, Texas.

Experiment With Freeze-Dried Foods

Robin Selden, executive chef of Marcia Selden Catering in New York City, says freeze-dried fare is a wedding must-have. “We love the bright, concentrated flavors a sprinkle of freeze-dried powder can bring to a dish. For example, delicious tiny freeze-dried tomatoes add crunch and intensity to salads and entrees.”

Caffeinate Your Guests Throughout the Event

Late-night coffee bars at receptions continue to be a perk for guests. “Couples offer cappuccinos, lattes and cold brews infused with CBD to go along with a late-night snack of burgers or breakfast tacos,” says Hanks. “It’s a great way to infuse the crowd with extra energy and fun vibes to dance the night away.”

Have a Postwedding Brunch

Postwedding brunches are making a comeback. “A farewell brunch (hello, stuffed challah French toast) means more variety and creativity for the menu options and more time with family and friends,” says Anthony Lambatos, co-owner of Footers Catering in Denver.

Sip on Creative Martini Variations

Move over, espresso martini. There’s a new way to imbibe. “We’re starting the trend of martinis on the rocks. I love the large ice cube with the skewered olive inside. It’s easier than drinking out of a martini glass, especially when you’re on the dance floor,” says Jennifer Schepps, director of catering at Abigail Kirsch catering in New York City.



Wow Guests With Adaptogenic Refreshments

An adaptogenic drink is an alcohol-free cocktail of plant and herbal ingredients like CBD and ginseng. Some producers assert adaptogenics can increase a person’s energy or assist with relaxation. This beverage can be great for people practicing a sober lifestyle but who want something that can loosen them up.

