



The Cake-Chatterer's™ Guide to Choosing The Perfect Wedding Cake

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The Focal Point

Since your wedding cake will be the *focal point* of your reception, it's important that you choose it wisely and well. It must be beautiful and make a statement, but at the same time, it must taste as good as it looks! After all, the wedding cake is *tradition!* Give it the respect it deserves.

History: When In Rome...

The Ancient Romans began the tradition of wedding cake. During the ceremony, the bride and groom were fed morsels broken from a wheat biscuit or roll. The remainder was crumbled over the bride's head as a symbol of fertility. The concept caught on, passed through the centuries, and was adopted by the various cultures of

the civilized world. By the time the custom reached Elizabethan England, the wheat cake, a symbol of sharing and fertility, had become more than just tradition. The Elizabethans stacked the rolls high and placed them on their reception tables as centerpieces, for all their guests to admire *and enjoy*.

But it took those effervescent, pastry-loving French to envision that these simple, primitive centerpieces, concocted from wheat biscuits, could be held together with sugar frosting. (This was the forerunner of the tiered wedding cake.) But OH! what the French did with those rolls!



The coarse wheat rolls evolved into succulent, fine-textured, cream-filled puffs. These too were stacked high, but were held together by the sticky sweetness of caramel. Later, the heavenly wispieness of spun sugar was used to decorate these sumptuous, shiny, golden pastries. In France, a bride and groom may still request the *croquembouche* (literal translation: crunchy mouthful) for their wedding cake, a remnant of seventeenth-century tradition. The wedding cake embodies a sense of history, of happiness and gaiety, fertility, plenty and good luck. *It is tradition*. Give it the respect it deserves.



The *croquembouche*

The Groom's Cake

Early American wedding cakes were fruit cakes, part of a tradition that the Pilgrims brought with them to America. It wasn't until the advent of white flour, baking powder and baking soda in the 1800s that white wedding cake, as we know it, became the norm. The tradition of fruitcake, however, has withstood the test of time (and is still popular in many parts of our country), and is *the* cake that later became known as the *groom's cake*. At the reception, it was cut, boxed and given to the guests as a



favor. According to legend, single guests who placed the boxed cake under their pillow would dream of their intended. Hence, it became known as *dreaming bread*. Traditionally, the groom's cake is placed beside the bride's, and today, it may come in any flavor or any shape that the groom desires (after all, it's *his* cake).

When I interviewed Sylvia Weinstock, that prestigious baker of celebrity cakes, she showed me one of her groom's cakes. It was a life-size golf-cart, constructed entirely of cake, even the wheels! It was an incredible engineering feat. And WOW! What a cake!

All Cakes Are *Not* Created Equal!

The following questions and comments are probably ones you've asked yourself and thought about. After all, wedding cakes come in many different shapes and sizes—and WOW! can the costs vary, but why? Let me shed some light on the subject:

- ❖ What makes for a great cake?
- ❖ Why do prices vary so much?
- ❖ I don't care about the cake, no one ever eats it.

- ❖ My caterer suggests serving a terrific dessert after dinner, so any dumpy cake will do.
- ❖ We're going to cut the cake at the beginning of the reception because the caterer needs time to slice it and serve it.

My clients asked these questions and made these comments so often that I had to ask: *What in the world has given wedding cakes such a bad rap?*

Take a few minutes to sit back and examine the role of the wedding cake throughout history. Think of the melt-in-your-mouth taste of a fantastic mocha cream, a rich, luscious, fruit-filled carrot cake. Imagine the elegance of a white wedding cake, five-tiers high, iced in a basket-weave of French vanilla butter-cream, topped with fresh, dew-laden flowers that fall casually down its sides... How can anyone slough-off the significance, beauty, and taste of this wonderful cake? There's none other like it! It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



What Makes for a Great Cake?

The ingredients. That's the reason supermarket cakes are considerably cheaper than those made by private, premium bakers like Sylvia Weinstock.

Most supermarkets use prepared mixes. Add a little water and Voila! you've got a wedding cake. Not so with premium bakers: butter, the finest cake flour, fresh eggs, and imported chocolate are the stuff of their cakes. These bakers really do put *your* money where *your* mouth is!

Ask the baker what type of ingredients they use. If they utilize the pre-packaged variety, either for the cake or the frosting, it's my advice to go elsewhere. You want a baker who mixes their own cake using butter, eggs, milk and cream. And one who creates their own icing using the finest ingredients. The taste of a pre-mixed cake covered in pre-packaged frosting (that's spiked with preservatives) is not worth their time or effort, or the money you're spending. *You want a real cake with real frosting!*

Make your demands known. This is one of the reasons that wedding cake' costs vary so much... and here's another:

Decorating Spells M-O-N-E-Y!

Bakers charge to decorate cakes: the more sugar roses, for example, the higher the cost. For that reason, *if you're trying to save money, don't have your cake decorated.* Tell the baker to ice the cake with a smooth buttercream frosting and let your family, friends, and/or florist do the rest. All the baker needs to do is deliver and assemble the cake—well in advance of the reception.

If the florist is decorating the cake, have them make a *cake crown* of fresh flowers for the top. Once the cake is assembled, they can put fresh flowers between the layers or around the layers—or tumble the flowers from the top to the bottom of the cake like a waterfall! Fresh flowers and greens can then be put artistically around the base.

No One Ever Eats It? A Double-Edged Dilemma

A wedding cake is a dichotomy. Supposedly, few people eat it, but what would a wedding be without one? *It is tradition.* Yet it's expensive and costs hundreds, even thousands of dollars. So the question is: Why would anyone in their right mind spend good money on something that no one eats? When I began researching the answer to this dilemma, it became evident to me that a wedding cake means one thing (any way you cut it): A waste of hard-earned dollars! Be smart. It doesn't have to be.



Don't Be Duped!

Don't let a caterer talk you into serving dessert with dinner. *You've paid for a wedding cake (even if it's part of your packaged deal).* Its purpose is to be seen, admired, *and eaten.* You may have spent hundreds, or even thousands of dollars on this traditional cake. *It is dessert!* And while it's true that the wedding cake is cut and

served long after dinner is over (which is why your caterer will insist that you serve an *additional* dessert with dinner), an additional dessert is redundant and *will cost you more money*.

If your catering contract includes an expensive dessert like cherries jubilee (that you're paying for), cancel it! Or, if your cake—and an additional dessert—are part of your packaged deal, cancel the dessert and put those dollars elsewhere! Spend the money on your honeymoon or *upgrade your cake*. Instead of *their* dessert, end the meal with a light sorbet, for example, or strawberries dipped in chocolate (one per guest). If that proves too costly, put a good plate of chocolate mints on the table. Dinner should always end with something sweet.

You are throwing money down the disposal if you purchase a wedding cake and then serve an opulent dessert with dinner. Who's going to have room to eat cake an hour or so later, no matter how good it is? By the same token, *you throw money away* if you purchase an inedible, tasteless "dumpy" cake. *Who would want to eat it?*

Make your cake the *piece de resistance* it should be. End the meal with light fare and *save the cake for later, when everyone can enjoy it and savor it. Make it as delectable inside as it looks outside*. I guarantee you: *They will eat cake, and you will have put your hard-earned dollars to good use!*

NOTE: *When the Cake Is Part of the Package*

When the catering facility or caterer includes the cake, it may be necessary to pay an additional fee to upgrade it. However, since you're no longer serving *their* dessert, they should be glad to exchange it for an upgrade to your cake. If you want extensive decorating, however, you may still have to pay an additional fee.

Your Cake Is The Last Hurrah!

I've seen numerous postings on the Internet about cutting the cake at the beginning of the reception. *Why? Why waste good money on a beautiful cake, only to have it ravaged at the beginning of the party? The cake is the focal point of the reception, to be looked at and admired*. It should be cut at the end of the evening, no matter what the caterer tells you.

Be Aware: Cake-Cutting Fees

After reading this information you may decide to hire a private, premium baker. Many establishments, however, charge a cake-cutting fee if you serve a cake other than theirs. (A fee is charged, per person, to cut and serve the cake.) This can get expensive, and it's outrageous! You've already paid a fortune to have your reception at their establishment. Why should you have to pay extra to have your cake cut? You shouldn't. Be a tough negotiator and get the charge waived. You should not have to pay for cake cutting!



A Word About Cake Toppers

I don't advise using anything valuable on the top of a cake, your grandmother's antique crystal figurine, for example, or expensive porcelain. If the cake table is bumped, off flies the cake-topper. Also, too often, they're stolen. Use fresh flowers on top of the cake or an inexpensive piece of porcelain. *Don't put anything atop a cake that you will worry about!*

***TIPS* from Sylvia Weinstock**

Whether you've hired your own baker, or your cake is part of your packaged deal, meet personally with the baker who will create your cake. Here are some tips for success from that great celebrity baker, *Sylvia Weinstock*:

- The size of the cake should relate to the size of the room. Tall ceilings, for example, require a tall cake.
- The size of the cake should relate to the size of the bride and groom. If they're small people, the cake should not overpower them. If they're tall, the cake should be also.
- The cake should relate to the ambiance of its surroundings. If it's positioned in a formal, ornate room, the cake should be formal and ornate, too. If it's outdoors, surrounded by light, beautiful, colorful flowers, for example, the cake should also be airy and vibrant.

- Relate the color of the cake to the color of the room, *not the bridal-party colors*. Let's say your colors are hot-pink and white and the walls of your reception room are paisley, green and purple. Would you want a fuchsia and white wedding cake? When in doubt, go white.
- *Get everything in writing*. The most complaints I hear from brides, after the fact, is that their cake wasn't designed to their specifications. Put everything in writing and leave nothing to chance.

Your Contract Must Include

- *The date, time and place of the affair.*
- *The time the cake is to be delivered.*
- *The specific size of the cake; how many it's to feed; the number of layers and design.* For example: one, four-tier, chocolate, double-fudge cake with raspberry filling. The first layer: 12" round; the second: 10" round; the third: 8" round; and the fourth: 6" round. The icing is white buttercream in a basket-weave design. Otherwise, the cake is plain. It will feed 150 people.
- *The cake topper:* whose responsibility it is to provide it and what it consists of, and its design, if the baker is providing it. For example, the cake topper will be made up of a white and pale-pink marzipan roses, about six inches tall.
- *The person (or company) responsible for assembly and decorating and what the decorating is to include.* For example, fresh white and pink roses in a cascade, from top to bottom. Base to be covered in greens, dotted with pink and white roses and baby's breath.
- *Waiver of cake-cutting fees* (if applicable).
- *Total cost of the cake and delivery and set-up fees* (if any), *applicable sales tax, deposit paid, and when the balance is due.*
- *Cancellation and refund policy.* (The contract should contain a clause stating that the deposit is transferable, if you have to cancel for any reason with 60 days notice or more, provided you reserve another cake with the vendor within a year of the contract date. (Both parties must initial the change.)

HAPPY WEDDING CAKES EVERYONE!

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