



New York Food Company tempts wedding guests with a chocolate fountain.

a chocolate-covered
Wedding

The bride and groom who vow to have chocolate on their wedding day will always have sweet memories to cherish.

By Barbara Wernik

Some couples dream of having a black and white wedding—only they're not thinking about clothes, but of chocolate—milk, dark and white—to be exact. For when it comes to matters of the heart, chocolate and weddings are the ultimate romantic combination—a perfect pair, destined to be together forever after.

As tempting as it may be to have a wedding menu that goes from chocolate soup to chocolate-covered nuts, the

rich confection is at its best when it's a featured element of a celebration: It's in a class by itself as a knock-out dessert, a fabulous favor or tantalizing tabletop accent.

Today's hottest wedding dessert trend—literally—is a flowing fountain of molten chocolate. Think chocolate fondue, just a hundred times bigger. For chocoholics, it doesn't get much better than this. According to Jim Wharton, of New York Food Company in Los Angeles, more than half of the weddings he caters include a chocolate fountain. Since the fountains have been around for a few years, Wharton likes to "wow" wedding guests with innovative ways to display them. "Sometimes we do multiple fountains, with white, milk and dark chocolate, so guests can mix and match," he explains. "Or we can put liqueurs in them—such as champagne, raspberry or orange. But you have to be careful, because chocolate attracts kids—so you can't do that if there are children present." In addition to homemade ladyfingers, he'll also put out pretzels, marshmallows, fruits and dried fruits alongside the fountain. "Brownie bites are wonderful, too. What's more decadent than chocolate dipped in chocolate?" he exclaims.



Treats from Chocolate Inspirations make delicious wedding favors.

Wharton points out that his company pre-skewers all foods, for aesthetic and sanitary reasons. And he considers it a must to have an attendant by the fountain to work with guests. Wharton estimates one fountain will serve about 150 wedding goers; figure on budgeting about \$10 per person, to cover the fountain, attendant and chocolate. (It takes about eight pounds of it to get the fountain fired up.)

Another current craze at weddings are mini crême brulees. Wharton says his company serves them in a trio of light and dark chocolates or flavored with liqueurs. Lighter desserts, like this and a chocolate mousse cheesecake, tend to be more popular than heavier sweets, such as flourless chocolate cake. "Smaller pieces of multiple desserts please more people," says Wharton. "Lots of variety is the best possible way to do dessert."

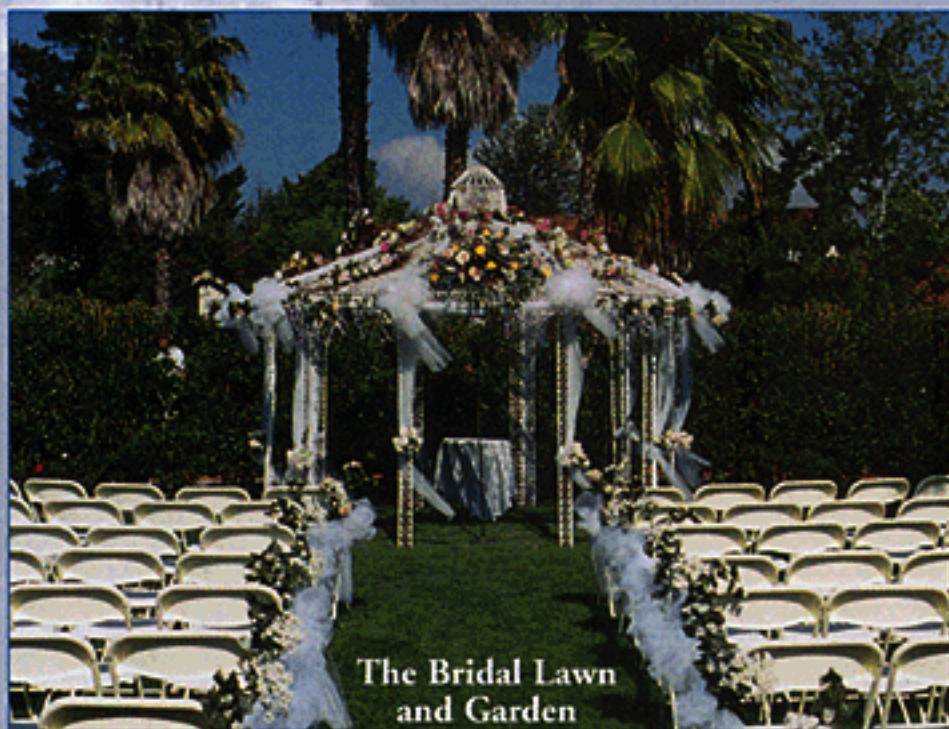
Nowadays, few guests leave weddings empty-handed. The quest for party planners, then, is to come up with something delicious and unique as a wedding favor. "Candy-to-go in 2004 was becoming a big thing, and I think it will be huge in 2005," points out Wharton. "Brides are turning the ride home into a feast. They're doing complete candy displays with cones that can be filled with

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sweets. It's like those candy stores at the mall, where you can take scoops of whatever you want. Chocolate mints or hard candies can be incorporated into that."

Another option is to hand out bags of cookies to departing guests. "We make white chocolate chip cookies in silver dollar size and package them in simple or personalized gift bags," says Wharton.

Personalized chocolates are a time-honored favor that never seems to lose favor with guests. At Chocolate Inspirations (www.chocolateinspirations.com), just about every edible can be personalized, from CDs to cigars. "We can't sell enough chocolate cigars," says Dianna Branum, owner of the Southeast Missouri company. "For a reception at The Cabana Club, the cigars were placed on a wooden tray and handed out—they looked exactly like real cigars. They're not just for men—women love to have them, too."

Another "huge" item, according to Branum, are chocolate roses with customized tags. Available in milk, dark and white chocolate, they can be made into an attractive table centerpiece by placing them in a vase with greenery. At the end of the affair, each guest takes a rose home as a wedding favor.

Perhaps Chocolate Inspiration's most versatile favors (for about 25 cents a piece) are stars, seashells, hearts and coins that are individually wrapped in gold, silver, blue and red foils. These can be placed in welcome baskets in hotel rooms, scattered across tabletops at bridal showers and receptions, or put in individual personalized boxes or sheer organza pouches.

Pictures and chocolate can be combined into a favor that offers immediate gratification and a memory to treasure later. A current hit at weddings is the personalized chocolate CD, which has a picture of the happy couple on the case and a chocolate CD inside.

Black and white or color photos can also be printed on the papers that encase foil-wrapped chocolate bars. "The papers can be engraved in gold or silver or metallic colors to match the foil. It's very beautiful and elegant looking," explains Barnum, who adds that a personalized chocolate bar can also be imprinted with a guest's name and table number on it to serve as a place card.

Whether used as a place card, tabletop decoration or party favor, chocolate is sure to add panache to any party. It can be used to make a big splashy statement—like the unveiling of a flowing chocolate fountain—or employed as a subtle, elegant accent to pre-party festivities, meals or decor. Any way you cut, slice, dip or package it, chocolate is always in good taste at weddings. ☪

Pauline Parry, owner of Good Gracious! Events in Los Angeles, is renowned for her inimitable entertaining style. She has several suggestions incorporating chocolate into a wedding celebration:

- Miniature chocolate handbags from Choco Choco House (www.chocochocohouse.com) are certain to be a conversation piece at showers and weddings. "They are a great part of a dessert at weddings or as a gift for people to take with them," she says.
- After a meal (and before the cake), it's refreshing to serve chocolate sorbet to guests. Then the wait staff can pour rose champagne over it. "Guests can either drink it with the champagne or they can use a spoon and enjoy it that way," she explains.

GETTING THE DISH ON CHOCOLATE FROM PAULINE PARRY

• For an "action station," consider serving chocolate crepes. The crepes can be

filled with chocolate ganache, chocolate-peanut filling, caramelized banana, whipped cream, etc.

• An innovative twist on chocolate-dipped strawberries for bridal showers is to serve ripe, stemmed strawberries (that have been scooped out) that are filled with swirls of dark chocolate mousse. Another option is to fill them with dark chocolate cheesecake.

• Add a novel touch to a bridal shower with M&M's in blue, pink or brown colors. The candy pieces can be personalized with the name of the bride or a special saying. "We serve them in 3-ounce martini glasses," Parry says. These are available at www.us.mms.com/us/.

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