

Catering magazine

The leading trade publication for foodservice and event professionals

MADE WITH LOVE

CREATIVE
AND ELEGANT
DESSERTS
TAKE THE CAKE
AT TODAY'S
WEDDINGS

PLUS

Wedding
Products and
Trends

Sherry Yard's
Sweet Gig

to assign or not to assign? the etiquette and design possibilities of escort cards and place cards

the seating game



There's no question that weddings are becoming more free-form. As couples seek to brand their wedding celebrations with their own personalities, they're often forgoing tradition—from replacing the traditional wedding cake with lavish dessert bars, to dancing down the processional aisle to the beat of their own drum.

When it comes to seating arrangements during the dinner reception, we advise our clients of the options, and let them decide which will best suit the size and personality of their event. Whether couples choose to assign their guests their tables and seats, or prefer the casualness of no seating chart, they should know the etiquette of each option—and the possibilities for creatively incorporating their choice into the wedding design.

Escort and Place Cards

The escort card is one of our favorite design elements in a wedding. Not only can it provide eye candy, the card relays important information about where a guest is sitting and, in some cases, what his or her dinner entrée will be that evening.

Many people use the terms "escort card" and "place card" interchangeably, but they are two different cards. The escort card—displaying the guest's name and table number/name—should be placed in a location to help the guest find his or her table, or to "escort" guests to their tables. A place card, displaying the guest's name at his or her place setting, designates the guest's seat. In addition, sometimes the place card discreetly alerts the server to the guest's choice of dinner entrée.

At Merrily Wed weddings, place cards have been perched in succulents (opposite, left) and attached to menus (opposite, right), while escort cards have hung from mini Adirondack chairs (above, left). Even a "reserved" sign can be designed to fit in with the decor (above).



Escort cards are more commonly used at events. If it's a formal event or if each guest has selected a dinner entrée (instead of a buffet, family-style service or the same entrée for all), then the escort card can be accompanied by the place card. Rarely are place cards used alone, except for smaller affairs where there are very few tables.

Although place cards require a bit more effort—including the design, double ordering of cards and figuring out where each person will sit—they can be worth it. They add a little extra formality to the dinner (if that is what the client is trying to achieve), and let guests know their intended spot.

If a food modifier is needed to designate the guest's dinner entrée for the server, this is typically on the place card. The food modifier itself is another design opportunity. We recommend having at least an escort card table for guests. This expedites the dinner seating, and makes guests feel more comfortable by avoiding the old high school cafeteria feeling of not knowing where to go.

If there are no place cards, then how does the server know if someone has an allergy? Simple; as an experienced planner, we make sure to provide the caterer with this information. Based on the table chart, we know ahead of time where the guest is sitting, and a simple, friendly name call by the server does the trick.

No Assigned Seating

Beyond escort cards and place cards, there is a third option that's been catching fire with engaged couples. "No assigned seating" is an old concept with new popularity. By not using escort cards or place cards, couples find their lives are simplified, and they avoid arguments as well as explosive situations that may arise by assigning tables—if Aunt Kathy can't be at the same table as Cousin Larry, but there's no extra seat at Table 2 and he has to be at Table 3, for example.

If a client decides to forgo assigned seating, we make some recommendations to make sure the dinner hour still flows smoothly. First, when not assigning guests to a table or specific seat at each table, make sure every seat at a table is set, allowing some flexibility for guests when choosing their spot. For example, if there are eight tables that seat 10 guests each but only 75 guests attending, make sure all 10 spots at each table are set, thereby providing 80 seats to select from. This means an extra five place settings, but guests will appreciate the additional seating options.

Second, it is an excellent idea to reserve a table or two for the wedding party and immediate family. Simply place a "reserved" sign at the designated table. No one will sit there unless they know they should. This makes it easy for Grandma to make sure she is sitting at the right table!

Ironically, two of our weddings that opted to go without a seating chart were otherwise very formal affairs. The couples appreciated the contrast of having a simplified seating arrangement at an intricate, detailed event.

Creative Presentation

Sometimes an escort card isn't a card at all! One of our favorite parts of the planning process is coming up with new and creative methods of escorting guests to their tables with inventive presentations. Use inspiration to go beyond a simple folded card. Guests love this ingenuity, and it gives the wedding couple another opportunity to add their personal style to their wedding day. From unique items to handwritten chalkboards presenting a seating chart, the ideas are endless.

A few stand-out escort card presentations we've created over the years include playful pinwheels



This page, clockwise from above: Escort cards arrayed atop greenery; a place card cleverly signals the groom's entrée choice; a succulent displays the place card while fitting in with the natural decor. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Pinwheels as escort cards; escort cards displayed on a branch; escort cards written on the "leaves" of a tree; a whimsical hanging escort card display.

TOP LEFT PHOTO BY CHRISMAN STUDIOS; TOP RIGHT PHOTO BY JONATHAN YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHY; BOTTOM MIDDLE PHOTO BY THE YOUNGRENIS; BOTTOM LEFT AND FAR RIGHT PHOTOS BY COURTNEY AARON PHOTOGRAPHY



Nothing Else Even Comes Close.

800.863.1616

www.caterEase.com

THE ELECTRIC HOTBAG™ CATERING BAG

Mobile. Modular. Lightweight.
All the benefits of commercial catering systems for only a fraction of the cost.

PACK-N-GO • FOLD FLAT DESIGN

800-927-6787 | 855-432-8224
U.S.A. Toll-free | Global Toll-free

hotbag.com



visit us
online

cateringmagazine.com

cateringmagazine.com

cateringmagazine.com

insider's insight

that spun with the lakeshore breeze; a hanging moss ball/floral wall arrangement displaying the guests' names and tables; mini-Adirondack chairs with wooden medallions; and—perhaps the most memorable—a tree, with each leaf conveying a guest's seat assignment.

Some of our favorite place card presentations include simply adding the guest's name to the top of the dinner menu, tying a name card around a floral or sprig of rosemary, and tucking the card into the napkin fold or even a succulent.

Functional yet fashionable, the seemingly small details of the escort card and place card shouldn't be overlooked when it comes to design possibilities. Even at an event without assigned seating, the "reserved" sign can be creatively constructed. Guests will love the personalization, and it will make your clients' wedding even more memorable. ●



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Merrily Rocco is the owner and lead consultant of Merrily Wed®, a boutique wedding design and planning company, located on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe, Calif. For the past decade, Merrily Wed has produced meticulously planned events and weddings for a discriminating clientele. National wedding magazines and popular wedding websites have consulted Merrily for wedding articles covering topics ranging from planning tips to design ideas. Weddings planned and designed by Merrily Wed have been featured in Destination I Do magazine, The Knot Northern California, California Wedding Day, Destination Weddings & Honeymoons, Catering Magazine, Modern Bride and Elegant Bride. For more information, visit merrilywed.com.

Exceeding Culinary Expectations

— MASTER THE EMERGING TRENDS —



March 6–8, 2016 Javits Center New York, NY

SHOW HIGHLIGHTS: Food Trends Experience, Ferdinand Metz Foodservice Forum, Live Culinary Demonstrations, New Product Gallery, The Pub, US Pastry Competition, Pride of New York, and over 550 Leading Vendors, and more!

Presenting:



Sponsored by:



Produced & Managed by:



Featuring:



Highlights Include:



GAIN A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR BUSINESS®
www.internationalrestaurantny.com