

Brides

Northern California

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GUIDE**

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NoCal Cakes & Menus

Location Inspiration

If you're lucky enough to be holding your wedding in one of Northern California's architectural gems, reflect its design elements in your cake. Not a cheesy mini replica of your site, but a beautiful and elegant interpretation like the one **Shinmin Li** of *I Dream of Cake* created for Karl Peterson and Holly Jacobson's winter wedding at the deYoung Museum.

"We added the little copper dots running along the cake as a subtle nod to the beautiful perforated copper wall at the deYoung," says Li. The white chocolate-covered cake's intricate floral design was then painted various shades of bronze and copper. This masterpiece took over 60 hours to complete. Cost per slice: \$25.



I Dream of Cake
San Francisco
415-989-2253
idreamofcake.com

Menu Tastings What You Need to Know

Most caterers offer tastings at which you can nail down the menu, but all caterers do it differently. Some offer buffets with multiple brides, other serve full meals one-on-one. Some caterers and reception sites hold tastings after you've booked them for your wedding, others allow a taste test before you decide. We asked a caterer who does both, **Ethan Mantle** of *Componere Fine Catering* in Walnut Creek (925-429-2400, componererefinedcatering.com), to guide you through the process.

▶ BOOK YOUR LOCATION FIRST

"If you have a reception location in mind, make sure the caterer can work in that venue, since some venues have exclusive catering contracts," says Mantle. However, if great food is more important, book your caterer first, and let them suggest suitable spots.

▶ INVOLVE ANYONE WITH FINANCIAL SAY

"The decision makers should be there, whoever that may be," says Mantle (read: the one signing the checks). "The couple and the bride's parents are the most common folks we see."

▶ THEY'RE NOT ALWAYS FREE

"It can be very expensive to put together a tasting," says Mantle, whose company charges a \$250 flat fee for four people (but if you end up booking, they credit that amount toward the final bill). Ask if your caterer will do the same.

▶ DON'T JUST PAY ATTENTION TO THE FOOD

Look at what the food is served on, and note the quality of the service and cleanliness of the kitchen. Also ask if the chef preparing the tasting will be available on your wedding day. If the answer is no, ask what steps they will take to make sure the food is of the same quality.

▼ Tuna tartare with wasabi caviar and tamarind sauce



DIY Rehearsal Dinners

Skip the formal restaurant, and get your families to mix and mingle at an interactive culinary event. Professional chefs from **Parties that Cook!** (415-441-3595, partiesthatcook.com) will teach groups of up to 100 how to prepare fresh, seasonal fare, either in your home or in a rented professional kitchen (try *Kitchen on Fire* in Berkeley or the *Thomas Fogarty Winery* in Woodside).

At "Chef's Table," a four-course rehearsal dinner extravaganza, guests are divided into groups to prepare recipes from the evening's gourmet menu, which is then served by the company's wait staff. They even include commemorative copies of the recipes, digital photos of the event, and cleanup. Cost: \$95 and up per person (with a 20 person minimum).

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