



EXPERT ADVICE | CONSULTING

THE ART OF THE AFTER-PARTY

Creating the perfect setup for post-reception parties.

Today's bride sets her sights on unique ideas that will up the ante on her wedding style; she wants something that will keep her guests talking about the wedding for years to come. One of those elements is the after-party, which is a trend that has stood the test of time. The after-party gives you a great way to continue to celebrate long after the wedding reception has ended.

LOCATION

When considering the site for a fabulous after-party, I recommend staying in close proximity to the reception so the transition will be a smooth and easy one. If you are having an intimate wedding, it will be easy to move a few guests to a choice location, but if not, then stay close. Be sure to discuss any noise restrictions and/or time parameters that the venue may impose for extended hours.

Estimate size. You don't want a space that is too small or too large for your number of guests. Keep in mind not all of your attendees will attend the after-party; many of the over-50 crowd will make their exit after the cutting of the cake. My general rule of thumb is to estimate approximately 50% of wedding attendees.

Consider alternative areas. If the venue has a second ballroom located near the reception location, this is generally my first recommendation. It is much easier to move a

large group to an area in close proximity.

Designate space. You can often utilize a single, large ballroom space for both your reception and after-party. This can be accomplished by sectioning off part of the ballroom with either the existing air walls or a "pipe-and-drape" partition that can also be a great element of décor. You can either create a dramatic entrance through the dividing walls or the guests can enter through the appropriate doors.

DÉCOR

When designing the décor for your after-party, you are bound only by your imagination – and in all my years of experience, I haven't met a bride yet who didn't have more than one decoration idea for her wedding. This is the perfect time to use some of the fantastic ideas and colors you didn't incorporate into your wedding. Pull out those tear sheets and use them for inspiration for your after-party.

Dance area. If a dance floor isn't included in the space, you can rent one. This type of temporary flooring comes in an array of styles. You can opt for the traditional parquet floor, black or white tiles, or (one of my favorites) a seamless vinyl dance floor that creates a reflective "wet" look that can be done in any color. If you opt not to rent flooring, you can leave an area of the room (I prefer the center) open for dancing and use breakaway patterns

– special lighting that creates a design on the floor – to designate the area.

Seating. One element I always use is lounge seating rather than conventional seating. I generally mix different styles and types of furniture to create intimate groupings throughout the room that encourage people to sit together and mingle. I always make sure to put some groupings close to the dance floor, as it's a perfect spot to have a cocktail and watch the revelry when you need a break.

Details. Draping and specialty lighting are elements I always try to incorporate. I like to mix fabric and bling – on the walls, the ceilings, you name it – then illuminate them to create depth and interest in the space. If the room is large, I will often bring in architectural items such as crystal columns to help fill the room. The bar itself can also be both functional and a great focal point, so I prefer to include a unique style that will reflect the ambiance of the event.

FOOD & DRINK

Although they will have enjoyed imbibing at your cocktail hour and dining at your reception, guests will appreciate having food items at your after-party to help sustain energy and balance alcohol consumption. The after-party is also an opportunity to have extra fun with your food choices.

Sustenance. When it comes to after-party treats, the items can be completely different from the food served at the reception. I like to have the food represent the couple in some way, such as nibbles that reflect their ethnic backgrounds, or food that falls into a theme that reflects their personalities. French pastries such as beignets and macaroons can be paired with crepes for a Parisian theme, or fun foods such as funnel cakes, deep-fried Oreos, and cotton candy can contribute to a carnival motif. These items may be passed or served at action stations.

Sips. This is the one area where I encourage brides to stay simple and consistent. If you have had an open bar all night, continue with the open bar. If you have had signature drinks, stick with the same ones so your guests aren't tempted to start mixing liquors. The only change I suggest is the addition of a gourmet coffee service with espresso, cappuccino, and cordials. Many venues will stop serving liquor at a certain time, but will allow you to continue with food service and a coffee station. This lets your guests continue to celebrate after last call and sober up a bit at the same time. **TIFFANY NIEVES-COOK**