

Catering to fit the Occasion

By Vasu Govender



Photo Adam Hilton

Vasu Govender has been a chef for 26 years, he is currently a SA Chef's Association judge and has won numerous over an illustrious career.

Not everybody realises how much wedding catering differs from any other function. Firstly, the wedding banquet needs to be generous as many guests fast all day in anticipation of a sumptuous meal. Secondly, the menu must cater for the varied and sometimes eclectic preferences of a broad spectrum of tastes and cultures. Finally, food will never taste great if it is not freshly prepared. This is a challenge.

Despite extensive planning the formalities of photographs and speeches often upset serving times. Although modern catering, using "Woollies style" food preparation with blast chillers and sophisticated computerised ovens have made a huge difference not all kitchens can afford this expensive technology. Either way, the catering team needs to be well organised and adept with their timing so that that food is never left



Photo Dror Eyal

standing, is served piping hot and in a way that all the guests receive their meal as quickly as possible.

Whether you choose plated or buffet menus, even the most laid back wedding is still a formal affair and the menu should be served with elegance and style. But fine food is not enough. The food is the heart and soul of the function and is planned to fit in with, and enhance, each unique moment at every turn.

Cocktail snacks after the wedding ceremony are used to tease the appetite and keep the guests happily occupied during the photographic delays. The most awkward moment of the function is usually when guests are first seated at their tables as, at this point, they are frequently complete strangers to one another. This is where food should come to the rescue. The serving of delicious platters of interesting fare, for example, breaks the stiff atmosphere and help guests to connect across the table. Guests need to be at ease by the time the couple arrive. The function will then be off to a fine start.

Speeches are your next challenge. This is the ideal time for the serving of an elegant plated entrée as a second course. It allows time for the serving of sparkling wine for toasts and offers some reprieve if there are too many speeches. It also heightens the moment for the most important speaker, the groom.

Unless there are unacceptable delays, it is recommend that the main course be served after speeches. Here a buffet option may be considered. Guests are usually quite happy to rise after sitting for a considerable period, the buffet allows for greater choice and the opportunity to satisfy larger appetites. It also encourages a more relaxed ambience, which is appropriate for this part of the function, and gives the couple the opportunity to mingle with their friends. Most importantly, however, insist that the buffet have at least one serving point for every sixty guests. As this is already the third course, a short delay for food is not unreasonable, but guests should all be seated again within fifteen to twenty minutes.

The plated option must be just right and I would recommend that two choices be offered. Unless you opt for a dessert buffet, the servings must be generous or cheese and biscuits should be provided for guests to



nibble on if they are still hungry. Make sure that fruit is included as not everybody eats cheese.

I would encourage a short delay before serving dessert, at which time you may wish to open the dancing. A buffet dessert is practical but if you want the meal to end in style a plated dessert served just after the formal cutting of the cake is very effective. The modern wedding cakes are so delicious these days that you may well wish to add this to the dessert.

Take advice with regard to your choice of food. As much as you know what you enjoy the chef will know, well in advance, what is popular and what isn't, so listen carefully to his suggestions. The perfect menu should be a balance of dishes not your list of personal favourites.

It should come as no surprise that I believe the food to be the most important component of the successful function. It is no coincidence that every important occasion, whether it is a candlelight dinner for two or a braai to celebrate the rugby, our richest memories usually happen because of a great meal.

