

The Ultimate
Bride's
GUIDE For
Buying
A **Wedding**
Cake



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By Edward Otto

The Ultimate Brides Guide for Buying a Wedding Cake has been the #1 guide for the past 14 years to find the perfect baker and wedding cake.

Its helpful information comes from 18 years of research with 350,000 brides (primarily the Millennial and Gen Z age group), 350 bakers, and various wedding vendors.

The first 182 pages covers a myriad of questions, facts, tips, and suggestions used to distill everything down to the last 10 pages, which is your *"Short and Sweet Instructions to Buy a Wedding Cake."*

Amusingly, we realize this is a reference guide and not an Agatha Christie novel. On the other hand, many brides say they read it cover to cover, because they are intrigued to gather all the tips, advice, and secrets it reveals.

Happy shopping and may your reception and wedding cake be...*perfect!*

The Ultimate Bride's Guide for Buying a Wedding Cake
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—How to Use This Guide—

Don't Even Think About Ordering a Wedding Cake Until You Discover What 350,000 Brides Have Shared.

This guidebook is written as a powerful reference source to *take the guesswork out of choosing* a competent and trustworthy wedding cake provider and wedding cake.

To begin, **please read the Preface and Introduction.** Those sections will help you r-e-a-l-l-y “get it.”

The book is divided into 11 eye-opening topics. The first 8 topics contain the 125 most frequently asked questions brides want answered, coupled with accompanying responses and solutions.

You will find every question-number has two common and similar questions that receive the same response. This unusual method was used because brides were asking us questions in different ways that had the same answer. In other words, the dual question method is used for the sake of clarity.

Throughout you'll find unique statistics, information, and insights.

The last two sections “*Dirty Little Secrets*” share what some people do to pull the wool over your eyes and “*Disaster Stories*” for your amusement and as a learning tool.

The book ends with an appendix that contains several helpful guides; the most important one being “*Short and Sweet Instructions for Buying Your Wedding Cake*”

This key tool packs everything into a step-by-step "BRIDE'S GUIDE" For Buying a Wedding Cake.

To put it another way, the first 182 pages of evidence are used to support our "Short and Sweet Instructions to Buy Your Wedding Cake."

To date, these instructions have helped over 1,000,000 brides-to-be over the past 14 years. They will help you as well.

—Topics and Questions—

Eye-Opening Topic 1- Qualifications

Many Baker/Designers Appear to be Exceptional. The Following Questions Will Help You Choose a “Great” Baker/Designer Over Those Bakers Who Think They are “Good Enough.”

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Eye-Opening Topic 6 – Quality

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Eye-Opening Topic **7** – Cake-Filling-Flavor-Frosting

You May Love the Flavor of Kiwi and Spinach Filling Nestled inside a Pumpkin Sponge Cake (Huh?), But It's A 50-1 Bet Your Guests Won't. Here Are Some Insightful Questions to Help You Choose Flavors That Will Make Your Cake Vanish Quicker Than Free One Hundred Dollar Bills.

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Eye-Opening Topic 9 - Delivery

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	<p>wedding cake using a lower cost mix, and/or a cheaper filling, hoping you don't notice. This saves them a ton of money.</p> <p>Are you really getting the exact cake you test tasted or is there some funny business going on?</p>	
Secret 10-5	<p>You get charged a higher price for your cake because you were told a senior staff member or a more skilled designer is required to decorate your cake, but... it is handed off to someone being trained and needs the experience at half the cost.</p> <p>Are you getting gouged on the price of your cake by having a less qualified designer decorate it?</p>	129
Secret 10-6	<p>The decorator says they can duplicate the picture you brought in from a magazine or the Internet down to the last detail, but in reality, they can't.</p> <p>Watch out for the under-qualified over-rated designer.</p>	130
Secret 10-7:	<p>You think you are paying for name brand fillings and liquors such as Reese's Peanut Butter Cup, Bailey's Irish Crème, or Di Sarino Amaretto, when some Baker /Designers actually use imitator brands—pocketing more profits.</p> <p>Just like fashionable designer purse and shoe "knock-offs," watch out for top-shelf flavor "knock-offs."</p>	130
Secret 10-8:	<p>A Baker/Designer charges you a bundle for custom handmade gum paste flowers. Actually, they were made in the Far East by someone getting paid \$. 75 per hour.</p> <p>Handmade flowers can run into the hundreds or thousands of dollars. Make sure you are getting what you pay for.</p>	131
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Secret 10-14:	<p>Any Baker/Designer you choose needs to have certain required permits to do business in your city, county, parish, district, or state? What are they?</p> <p>Does the business you work for have all the legal documents to operate a business? Don't you think your Baker/Designer should?</p>	136
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Secret 10-16:	<p>Most Baker/Designers do not have a written guarantee.</p> <p>Ask your Baker/Designer for their guarantee. If they don't have a written one, you might think about heading for the door.</p>	138

Secret 10-17:	Many Baker/Designers charge you dearly if you cancel your cake. Can anyone say, "here's a quick way to lose 250 dollars?"	139
Secret 10-18:	Many Baker/Designers do not carry enough liability insurance. Some don't have any. If you don't think getting sued should be part of your wedding plans, it's a good idea to ask about insurance.	139
Secret 10-19:	Some Baker/Designers have pending lawsuits against themselves or their business they don't want you to know about. If you want to get your money back from a dreadful wedding cake, you might have to wait in line.	141
Secret 10-20:	Your personal information may not be protected, and it could be available to any employee. Are you aware your information is most likely accessible to people in the bakery who you don't know and have never met? Worse, they may have access to your home address, phone number, and possibly your credit card information.	142

Eye-Opening Topic 11 – Disaster Stories

Exposed Wedding Cake Catastrophes Told by Brides (sometimes laughing — sometimes weeping) and How to Stop Them from Happening to You...Most of Them.

Disaster 11-1:	My wedding cake tasted like a pair of dirty socks and crumbled like a two-year-old cookie.	143
Disaster 11-2:	My jaw hit the floor when I saw my wedding cake. Not because it was perfect, because it must have been decorated by the Baker/Designer's two-year old.	144
Disaster 11-3:	I had a person do my wedding cake who was a friend of a co-worker from my office. After all, it saved me \$201. Actually, it cost me a lifetime of bad memories.	144
Disaster 11-4:	When you pay \$3000 for a wedding cake to serve 300 guests it shouldn't only serve 200. A year later, I am still apologizing to my friends that didn't get a piece of cake.	145
Disaster 11-5:	We had an outdoor reception with the wedding cake placed on a lovely table beside a flower garden. Everything looked beautiful until the cake attracted every bee for 50 miles.	145
Disaster 11-6:	I don't know what was more embarrassing; when my maid of honor fell on the floor from having one too many...or when my wedding cake fell smack on the floor.	146
Disaster 11-7:	Don't feel too badly for those bride's wedding cakes that show up an hour after the reception begins. At least they received a wedding cake.	146
Disaster 11-8:	The wedding cake was supposed to be square instead of round, it was supposed to be 5 tiers instead of 3, it was supposed to have...OH NO...they delivered someone else's wedding cake instead of mine!	147
Disaster 11-9:	I like dogs and cats like the next person, but not when their hair is in my wedding cake. Also, why do you think my frosting tasted like cigarette smoke?	147
Disaster 11-10:	We had our reception in a lovely brand-new structure in the country. It was surrounded by old trees, waterfalls, and a lake. It didn't occur to me I would have a couple uninvited guests who would eat my wedding cake like a couple of wolves.	148

Acknowledgements

There are over 600 people and their organizations that deserve acknowledgments. Most of them are hard-working Baker/Designers, caterers, wedding planners, reception hall owners, country club banquet managers, hotel banquet managers, bridal website executives and their staff who supplied opinions and answers to the research.

It was agreed by consensus, all of the individuals and their companies will not be named for competitive reasons. These individuals are using the same research results from this book to improve their bride's experience and to become "great" in their fields of expertise.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Baker/Designers who initially didn't recognize their lack of customer service, but now fully embrace and support our efforts to provide an exceptional wedding cake experience for brides everywhere.

Finally, we wish to thank all the brides who were surveyed and interviewed. Their invaluable input has created a roadmap for future brides-to-be, complete with customized signposts to help them through the maze of uncertainty.

Preface

After speaking with thousands of brides, we found there is a lack of in-depth and confusing information in the marketplace for hiring any person or business for your wedding.

This guidebook will at least give you authoritative and potent help in one area...your wedding cake.

Sure, you can find all kinds of surface level information on Internet wedding sites, in magazines, or wedding planning guides that give you that “*Oh so good feeling.*”

However, they don’t really address the critical need-to-know information. Our mission is to give you every last detail about what you absolutely need to consider before choosing your Baker/Designer and cake.

Our team brings the whole kitchen sink and lays everything out. Beyond your wedding cake, we discuss concerns about insurance, legal issues, (*we’re not providing legal or insurance advice*) business structure, management, and every other conceivable subject our research deemed crucial.

The information is presented in a non-bias fashion. We do not favor independent cake designers over small or large bakeries or over pastry chefs etc. We let you draw your own conclusions.

It is presented like an attorney who is pleading their case in front of a jury, “*Just the facts, ma’am!*” Just like an attorney, we have built a case of evidence for you to consider.

Every Baker/Designer you speak with should be put on the stand and grilled with the questions we’ll present.

Then, it is up to you to use this information and find the finest cake baker within your means.

We didn’t set out to prove any preconceived notions about what brides wanted to know. Through our survey and interview process, brides, just like you, told us what they wanted to know in explicit terms.

Our mission was to find a “*set of standards*” exhibited by the greatest Baker/Designers we could find and couple them with responses from brides. Then, use those standards to create tools for you to gauge any Baker/Designer.

In other words, we’re keeping it real. No sugar coating. No fairy tales. Your’re getting a front row seat to the good, bad, ugly, and funny...straight from the mountains of research.

The 350,000 brides who helped us want you to know, our “keeping it real” way of writing this book offers you the absolute best advice, because it’s honest, helpful, and trustworthy.

Due to this approach, we are happy to report, this book provides wedding cake bakers a roadmap for standards they can use, and it offers brides, just like you, a roadmap to find those bakers. It’s truly a win-win.

Introduction

“Good is the enemy of Great.”

Jim Collins, author-Good to Great

After reading Jim Collins’ book, “Good to Great,” we were presented with the in-your-face reality that many bakeries, cake shops, pastry chefs, country clubs, grocery store chains, and individuals who we classify as **“Baker/Designers” (B/Ds)** were not doing a “great” job of running their wedding cake business.

That is not meant as a disparaging remark, it’s meant to point out, those bakers were doing what Mr. Collins considers only a “good enough,” job of selling wedding cakes instead of a “great” job.”

[If you’re not familiar with the business book “Good to Great,” it offers a blueprint for all businesses to achieve greatness versus being ordinary, or what he calls “Good Enough.” His advice is absolutely brilliant and can help any company that wants to become “great.”]

To understand the question of how and where to improve, so bakers could do a “great” job, we needed to begin by researching one central question; do B/Ds understand how to fulfill the wedding cake needs, wants, and expectations of brides?

We also needed to examine whether B/Ds were making an all-out effort to provide brides with great overall value. *(Value meaning the combination of product (wedding cake), customer service, and price.)*

(As of this 11th edition, wedding cake bakers are now able to take the first course of its kind titled, “Wedding Cake Sales Guru.” It was released in June of 2021. The training teaches B/Ds how to provide brides with “great” customer service in place of settling for service that’s “good enough.”)

We began by performing competitive intelligence with 35 wedding cake purveyors in our immediate four-state region. We began by comparing their standards against what we felt were current standards. We discovered 14 of them were, 6 were poor, 10 were questionable, and 5 were pretty good. *(At least, that is what we thought at the time.)*

Incredibly, not one of them was “great;” *(I’ll admit, not even my bakery was close to being great)* not one great B/D out of 35 (according to Jim Collins’ standards). Wow, how could that be? Was it lack of technical skills, customer service skills, marketing skills, management skills, what?

We decided to take our insights to large bakeries, small bakeries, B/Ds working from their home, chain grocery stores, country clubs, and caterers outside of our competitive region.

To our total amazement, most of them were not interested in what we had to say.

Yes, I’m being serious.

They were comfortable with being “good enough” and had no interest in changing or becoming better, let alone “great.”

Here is what we heard all too often, ***“We’ve been selling wedding cakes our way for years and things seem to be fine. We don’t need or want to change anything, but thanks for asking.”***

Even as we conduct research with bakeries in the end of 2021, there are many owners who still don’t speak with us or want to know what they can be doing better to improve –YOUR– experience.

It is for that reason we began an organization called “Gold Standard Bakers of America.”

The bakers in “Gold Standard Bakers of America” do want to be the best they can be. They don’t believe in settling for being “good enough.” All of them have a passion for being “great,” and desire to serve you to the best of their ability.

“Gold Standard Bakers” would like you to consider this question:

When a wedding cake baker feels it’s okay to be “good enough,” instead of being “great,” who is actually being served better, you...or themselves?

Consider this philosophical point:

If a person who owns or manages a bakery or cake boutique does not possess the mindset to be the “greatest,” how great do you think you’ll be treated?

Something had to be done for uninformed brides, but what? Then we had a “light bulb” moment; why don’t we give all our research to the brides instead of the B/Ds in the form of a guidebook?

The team decided, *“Let’s help brides help themselves!”* Let’s give them an overflowing purse of vital facts and tools they can use to find a great B/D, a wedding cake, how to order a wedding cake (price, design, flavors, frostings), and get the cake delivered...while avoiding typical problems.

We knew with suitable research of former brides, trusted B/Ds who wanted to be “great,” and brides-to-be, a guide could be written that would pinpoint with laser accuracy how to assist you and put you in complete control of buying a wedding cake instead of wondering if the B/D was “great.”

Our research odyssey was launched on January 4, 2004. (It still continues 18 years later.) We began the journey by asking 250 brides what they wanted to know. This included worries or concerns about buying or ordering a wedding cake, questions they wanted answered in their search to find anything about wedding cakes, and what criteria, if any, they were using to choose a B/D.

The original 250 brides were inquisitive to the tune of 1827 questions. After closer examination, we found many of the questions similar in nature, so we distilled them to a select group of 300.

We needed to see if a larger sampling would correlate with the smaller initial group or whether the original group had missed the boat.

Therefore, we gave the 300 select questions to a second larger group of 1175 brides that were interviewed over the course of 2 years. The interviews were held with brides in 34 cities covering 18 states. We found it doesn’t matter if you are getting married in LA, Seattle, New York City, Miami, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Houston, or smaller cities like Harrisburg PA, Lansing MI, Tulsa, OK,

Eugene OR, or Little Rock AR or any number of smaller cities. The same concerns and worries were brought up again and again. The results demonstrated the larger group drew an exact parallel with the smaller group.

From those 300 select questions, we used an 80-20 sales rule that says find answers and solutions for the majority (80%) of your customers' problems. The results left us with 200 core questions representing 93% of what brides really...really wanted to know. *(As of July 2021, we have surveyed and interviewed an additional 18,630 brides over the last twelve months. As of today, we have scaled back the 200 core to 125 questions.)*

Now, we needed the final piece of the puzzle. We needed to unearth a wide variety of opinions and answers to all 125-core questions. To accomplish the task, we contacted one hundred B/Ds around the country to see if they wanted to get their hands-on piercing insight into the minds and hearts of what brides really want to know about wedding cakes and the B/Ds who made them. In exchange, the B/Ds were offered the research results so they could dramatically improve their own wedding cake processes.

To gain further insight and gather more points of view, we contacted and interviewed 43 caterers, wedding planners, and reception hall owners from New York to California.

With this huge amount of research under our belt, we felt confident we possessed the quintessential mother-load of what brides wanted to know about wedding cakes.

We were now ready to write a reference guide based upon the research.

The questions, answers, and experiences you will be reading are the secret exposed thoughts of all the individuals we surveyed and interviewed.

As an added benefit, the research provided us with a multitude of information to develop innovative tools for your use. (Some of them are in the Appendix.) Unless a B/D is a "Gold Standard Wedding Cake Baker," this guidebook will provide you with more than enough help to understand who cares to be only "good enough" versus those who are "great."

Put aside your fear of this book being outdated. It has been written utilizing a formula called a "Living Book." That means the contents are continuously researched and updated every October reflecting the best and most current information.

Before you launch yourself into "Topic One," we need to go over a few points of interest and clarification.

The table of contents is divided into 11 "Eye-Opening Topics." The questions within the topics are listed using a numerical and sequential format for quick and easy reference.

From the completion of over 350,000 (as of Sept 2021) surveys, brides supplied us with enough questions to generate two variations of the same basic inquiry. Please note both questions receive the same answer. Brides stated this approach helped them relate better to individual questions.

There are 6 items to become familiar with before you move ahead. The first three are as follows:

1.) **BAKER/DESIGNERS (B/Ds).** The titles of cake decorators such as “Cake Artists,” “Cake Designers,” “Pastry Chefs,” “Master Baker,” “Cake Decorator,” “Cake Sculpture” “Home Decorator,” “Certified Decorator” have been standardized as Bakers and Cake Designers or to be further known as B/Ds.

2.) **RUN.** Run refers to the advice for packing your purse or wallet and heading for the nearest door.

3.) **GOLD STANDARD BAKER (GSB).** After the research was completed and the tools created for this guide, we formed a set of standards titled “Gold Standard” measurements. The B/Ds who helped with the research and decided to use all the tools in the book are now “*Gold Standard*” wedding cake bakers. As of this writing, there are only a handful of bakeries and cake boutiques in the US that have met or willing to meet the necessary standards.



The final three symbols target particular points. They are:



PRICELESS ADVICE: These are informational “diamonds in the rough” that will put you “in-the-know.” Be sure to read all of them.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: You’ll discover behind-the-scenes information that is revealing, could be shocking, and some find controversial.



TIPS FROM YOUR “PERSONAL-MANIAC:” A little extra guidance from me, Ed Otto, obtained from working in the trenches with those 350,000 brides.

My team and I have set the bar extremely high to measure the desire and ability of a B/D to be “great.”

For those B/Ds who want to be “great” at wedding cakes, the bar needs to be set high. Some B/Ds think we have set the bar so high you have to climb to the top of Mt. Everest to cross it.

For B/Ds who find it too difficult to comply with our “Gold Standard” measurements, recall what we stated a couple of pages ago about people or business owners who are run their business with mediocrity as their guiding principle.

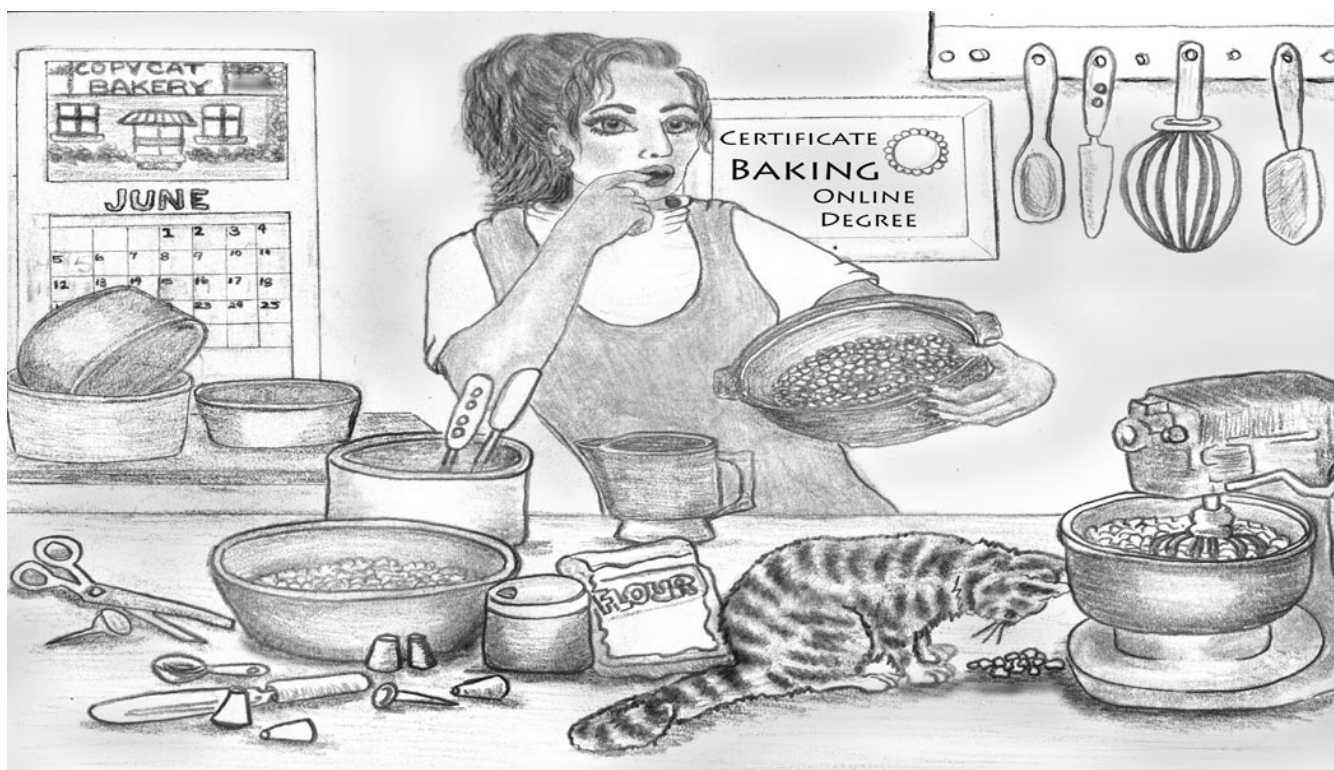
Remember the typical comment when we tried to share our research findings with a fair number of B/Ds, “*We’ve been selling wedding cakes our way for years and things seem to be fine.*”

We’ll let you decide if you want to do business with them.

Further, you'll be able to set the bar of “acceptance” where you want it. Most importantly, you’ll discover what it takes to find a B/D who cares enough about you to be..."GREAT."

It is quoted by many “Gold Standard” bakers, “This guide will revolutionize how brides buy wedding cakes.”

Maybe...or maybe not. We just hope it helps the way you purchase yours!



Eye-Opening Topic 1 — Qualifications

Many Baker/Designers Appear to be Exceptional. The Following Questions Will Help You Choose a "Great" Baker/Designer Over Those Bakers Who Think They are "Good Enough."

The process of choosing a qualified B/D to make your wedding cake is closely related to a job interview. However, it is you conducting the interview. You will be watching for many of the same characteristics any good company looks for when hiring great employees. Just as any company wants to know if you are qualified for the job, you will be asking questions to find out if the B/D is qualified to make your wedding cake.

To begin, we have put together a 10-point checklist of positive traits your B/D should possess and 5 negative traits you need to avoid like a bad hairstyle.

By the way, you can use these quality assurance measures to hire anyone for your wedding.

Look at the following traits. How many of these qualities does your B/D need to possess to make you feel warm and fuzzy? If you are like most brides, your answer will be most of them.

- 1) Honesty and Trust. You need to feel confident they are treating you fairly. If you can't get past this first hurdle, it is going to be difficult believing anything they say.
- 2) Skill. Does the person or company have the necessary skill to bake, design, and decorate your cake(s)? As a side note, don't make the common mistake of believing they are good at *every type*

of decorating because they are skilled at only a few. *(As an example, they may be really good at working with fondant, but not necessarily working with buttercream frosting.)*

- 3) Caring. They should be able to provide their undivided attention for you from beginning to end. You should feel as though your wedding cake is the only one, they are doing the entire year. They should demonstrate their desire to care about your needs and wants, not what they want to sell you. They should be caring enough to talk with you twenty times, if necessary, without getting irritated.
- 4) Open-Minded. Many brides have ideas they would like incorporated into their cake design. For example, you might find a picture on the Internet or from bridal magazines that looks really cool. If the B/D doesn't want to do it, they probably don't have the skill, or they are not willing to try. You'll want to know this before you hire them.
- 5) Conscientious. **This is the most important attribute. Conscientious people typically will do everything necessary to make your wedding cake the best. They will come in earlier and stay later to put in every last bit of effort to make your cake perfect. Moreover, here's the clincher; if you're happy, it makes them very happy.**
- 6) Artistic and Creative. Yes, you definitely want someone who knows how to put together elements of color, texture, size, and shape. Most wedding cakes fail at looking amazing because the B/D does not understand how to properly design a wedding cake. The top B/Ds are simply more creative and artistic than their counterparts.
- 7) Organized. Most problems with wedding cakes start here. In fact, 86% of the problems with wedding cakes have something to do with information not being followed, misinterpreted, or forgotten on the order form. *(Hint: most problems with your wedding will start with vendors being disorganized or at least not organized as well as they should be.)*
- 8) Problem Solver. Your B/D might be very conscientious and very artistic, but if they can't solve problems...you've got a problem. Since research has shown a 5.24% *(based upon 86,500+ brides Sept 2016-July 2021)* problem rate with wedding cakes that means your B/D better be efficient at solving any problem with your cake.



PRICELESS ADVICE: Ask your B/D about some of their typical problems with wedding cakes and how they solve them. If your B/D says, they never have problems...**RUN!** Even the best organizations we could find had a 1.5% problem rate or stated another way, a 98.5% quality score.

- 9) Responsive. You need someone who returns phone calls and is quick to make adjustments for you.

As an example, a snowstorm was about to bury Denver, Colorado. The bride knew many out-of-town guests would not be able to make the trip, so she wanted to cut back on the size of the cake. The bride called her B/D to see if the cake could be made smaller and if the B/D was still able to deliver it. The answer was yes. The B/D had a four-wheel drive SUV to get the cake to the reception. Best of all, with less than a one week notice the B/D was willing to downsize the cake. The result: the bride was elated!

10) Good Communicator. This trait is just about as important as the ability to be conscientious.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *This is a crucial notation: the ability to be a good communicator means the B/D should be able to communicate exactly everything they have to offer in plain English, not “decorator-eese.” He or she should be able to write your order in a way that allows you to know what you are going to receive. In addition, your B/D must be able to extract what thoughts and ideas you have and understand how to interpret them. In other words, a good B/D knows how to explain his or her services in plain English and extract your inner thoughts while leaving you with a sense of confidence.*

The ability to communicate is so important that our research shows most problems involve a lack of understanding (*what the bride really meant*) between the B/D and bride.

Here are the 5 negative and destructive traits you need to avoid like a bad plastic surgeon. If the person you are interviewing is exhibiting a few of these behaviors, they could ruin what should be a fun experience and turn it into a dreadful affair. Our advice...RUN!

- 1) Extreme arrogance. Many B/Ds who are very good, know they are very good. Unfortunately, some of them let it go to their heads. You shouldn't mind if a B/D is proud of his or her work, but there is a limit. The problem with overly arrogant people is they don't care if you perceive them that way. Your problem with this type of person will be their reluctance to see things your way. They always know better. Your ideas for a unique design will be thrown aside like a cheap dress. After all, didn't you go to them for their creative and artistic talent; for their advice; for their ability to create the perfect wedding cake?

Wooooh! We advise shying away from this type of person if you want input for the design of your cake. Again...RUN!

- 2) Disorganized. This one is a little tougher to see on the surface. Typically, larger B/Ds who decorate and deliver more than 3-5 wedding cakes per weekend have a system to bake, decorate, and deliver wedding cakes week in and week out. You can feel fairly comfortable they have their act together. It is the small B/D who creates your wedding cake and maybe an additional cake per weekend that you should scrutinize a little closer.

Just a little side note, disorganized B/Ds are the ones who are typically late with your wedding cake or worse forget your cake altogether.

- 3) Inconsistent. This B/D will have a tendency to flip-flop, on what seems to be everything they say.

In our research, the B/Ds who were inconsistent in what they told brides were 79% more likely to charge a higher price than B/Ds who had a standardized price list and could explain their pricing structure.

These are the B/D's who are more likely to overcharge you.

- 4) Over-Inflated Self Confidence This type of B/D believes they are better than they really are. If you ask them if they have experience making a “*four-foot Eiffel Tower cake made from rice*”

crispy treats, covered with Rolled White Chocolate Clay, blinking lights with a blown sugar couple traversing the top of the tower,” they would say, “Of course!”



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *This type of B/D actually believes, confidently believes, they are very talented and can make anything you ask them. This type of person is analogous to the singers who try-out for the American Idol TV show and really believe they are very good, when in reality, everyone but them knows they sing like a pair of fingernails shrieking across a chalkboard.*

- 5) Poor Housekeeping. Look around, does the floor look clean, have the shelves been dusted, are the displays old, are the employees well groomed?

As the adage says, **“Companies with impeccable standards deliver impeccable results.”**

If the place of business you visit isn’t tidy and fresh looking, it typically means they don’t see a problem. So, think to yourself, if they don’t put forth the effort to keep their business shipshape, how much effort will they put toward my cake?



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *If the B/D you are interviewing has most of the first ten traits and doesn’t display the last five—you should place them on your “A” list.*

Question 1-1:	What questions should I be asking to find a really good and trustworthy Baker/Designer? What foolproof questions should I be asking every Baker/Designer to make sure they are really good?
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Take a look at the following inquiries and see how they are all very similar to the initial question. *(These are unedited questions from other brides.)*

- Most of us are getting married for the first time. What do I ask?
- I’m scared I won’t ask the right questions. What should I be asking my B/D?
- Are there any standard rules about choosing a wedding cake baker?
- How do I begin looking for a B/D? How do I decide among all the bakers?
- How can I choose someone that I can trust and do what I want?
- I don’t know how to plan anything about a wedding cake. What is the most important characteristic about choosing a B/D?
- Should I choose a B/D who works from their home where they take my order, bake, decorate, and deliver it? Or should I go to a larger B/D with more employees?
- Should I choose a B/D who specializes in particular cake styles?
- What options do I have in choosing a B/D?
- How do I find a good B/D?
- How do I find a good B/D or at least one that I feel comfortable with?

For the most part, the remaining 125 questions are “answers” to this first central question. Although some questions appear to be the same, you might be surprised at how the answers are

different. You are highly advised to read every question to get an expert opinion from the collaborative effort of “Gold Standard Wedding Cake Bakers” across America.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Look in the “[32 Bakery Buster Questions Most Bakers Hope and Pray You Don’t Ask](#)” in the appendix section. These are 32 important questions you should seriously consider asking a wedding cake provider.*

Question 1-2:	What are the differences between getting my cake from a grocery store, a regular bakery, a specialty cake shop, or an individual out of their home? How do I choose one kind of Baker/Designer over another?
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To help you understand the differences between each of the groups, we have broken down each group using five types of criteria. They are:

- (a) Cake flavors, fillings, frosting types.
- (b) Variety of wedding cake styles.
- (c) Cake designer’s ability.
- (d) Price.
- (e) Reliability.

1. GROCERY STORE BAKERIES.

Grocery store bakeries are typically contained within a grocery store as a separate department managed by a bakery manager or a deli/bakery manager. They usually offer many bakery products including wedding cakes. Most grocery store bakeries are known for their bread and pastries first and everything else second. It is rare to find a grocery store bakery focused on wedding cakes, but there are some out there.

(a) Cake flavors, fillings, frosting types.

Brides have told us grocery stores tend to have fewer options when it comes to cake flavors, fillings, and decorations. *(Because many grocery store chains buy cakes frozen from a food manufacturer or receive them frozen from a central baking facility for the chain.)* Even if they bake their own cakes, they have a limited selection of flavors. In every instance, fillings are purchased in a prepared state. Many grocery store chains do not make their own frosting, but rather purchase pre-made frostings in large pails. This tends to make the frostings and fillings commercial tasting.

(b) Variety of wedding cake styles.

Grocery stores tend to be the most limited. Sometimes it’s a lack of talent, but most of the time we found management had a policy of limiting the decorative level of wedding cakes. **We were told over and over again, management did not want a decorator spending four hours, to a whole day, on one fancy wedding cake, no matter how much they charged for it.** In addition, they cannot offer too many styles because it would cause consistency problems between the stores. *(Grocery store chains want to offer cakes to their customers that can be decorated by any decorator at any location. Since they have many decorators who have different levels of talent, they offer cakes all their decorators have the ability to create.)*

(c) Cake designer's ability.

The employees who decorate wedding cakes are less likely to have advanced skill sets to produce high-end wedding cakes.

(d) Price.

They tend to offer lower prices, which happen to coincide with their rankings on the rest of the types of criteria.

(e) Reliability.

Their ranking is high for reliability. Grocery stores run their business according to a systematic approach meaning every department in the store, including the bakery, has a system for operating their department. In the bakery department, they have a system for taking and fulfilling wedding cake orders. You can feel fairly confident you will receive your cake according to what you ordered and get it delivered on time.

Many grocery store chains offer complete packages for purchasing the cake, the flowers, and doing the catering. This is a great option for the budget-conscious or budget restricted couple.

Overall, our research shows grocery stores offer the lowest prices, and, in many cases, the lowest overall quality.

2. RETAIL BAKERIES.

Retail bakeries typically are stand-alone stores, although they may have multiple locations that offer many bakery products including wedding cakes. They have the perception of being better than grocery stores and, in many communities, as good as the specialty cake shop.

(a) Cake flavors, fillings, frosting types.

They tend to have a broader selection of all three items over grocery stores, but not as many as a specialty cake shop. They also tend to use cake mixes or bake cakes from scratch. Most purchase prepared fillings. Approximately 15% make their own fillings. Most of them use a combination of homemade type frostings and commercially prepared frostings.

(b) Variety of wedding cake styles.

This varies depending on the city and area of the country. In more competitive locations, such as in a large city, variety and options are tremendous. In smaller cities or cities with limited competition, the variety decreases. In most cases, the retail bakery offers more styles for you to choose from than the local grocery store bakery. With more and more brides wanting wedding cakes taken from the Internet to duplicate, the retail B/D has been forced to increase their skill and hire better talent to produce the requested designs, which is a good thing.

(c) Cake designer's ability.

It depends. Most retail bakeries are family-owned and function with the whole family involved in the bakery's operation. Usually a mother, daughter, niece, or nephew is the cake designer. (*The reality show, "The Cake Boss" is a good example.*) You'll have to do your homework because the skill levels between retail bakeries vary tremendously.

(d) Price.

Usually moderate and up. They are higher than grocery stores, but lower than boutique or specialty cake shops.

(e) Reliability.

Their reliability is rated as good. Retail bakeries live and die according to their reputation. They cannot afford to make too many mistakes. This includes problems with wedding cakes. If I operate a grocery store and mess up a few wedding cakes, I still have steaks, shampoo, and Twinkies to sell. However, if I own a bakery and mess up more than a few times, the whole community knows, and goes elsewhere.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *As a marketing consultant, I can tell you being “unreliable” is one of the top three reasons bakeries fail. By the way, the other two are lack of “management skill” and “consistency of product.”*

3. SPECIALITY CAKE SHOP, BOUTIQUE CAKE STORE, OR CAKERY.

Cake shops are typically a single stand-alone store owned and operated by a couple of friends, husband and wife, mother and daughter, or single individual. They usually employ 2-8 people to keep the shop exclusive and to control all aspects of quality. Usually, you will be working directly with someone who knows the cake business fairly well and can answer most of your tough questions. They are perceived as the most expensive and best place to purchase a wedding cake.

(a) Cake flavors, fillings, frosting types.

Most cake shops have their own special list of flavors, fillings, and frostings. This is exactly what makes them unique and differentiates them from their competitors. Flavors and fillings vary according to where you live. Whereas Key Lime is a favorite in Florida and Kiwi in California, couples in Des Moines, Iowa, wouldn't think of either. Part of the fun is to try different concoctions from the different cake shops in your area.

(b) Variety of wedding cake styles.

The specialty B/D offers the most. Customers, like you, go to them for that exact reason. If there is one comment all specialty cake store owners hear as a complaint it is this; **“If I wanted a cake to taste or look like ‘THAT’, I could have gone to the grocery store.”** There are high expectations for exceptional cakes from this type of B/D.

(c) Cake designer's ability.

You can expect to find the highest degree of skill, which should show in their displays and previous work. This is the place to take your photos from the Internet and challenge the B/D to replicate it. On the other hand, many of these skilled professionals also are happy to create a simple cake for the bride who wants a great tasting cake without all the fu-fu type of decoration.

(d) Price.

It will depend on the demand of the shop. If they stay busy all year around, expect to pay far above average prices. Generally speaking, though, they will price their cakes according to a minimum to maximum price range. You choose how much you want to spend, and they will help you stay within your budget. Just be aware there are B/Ds out there that will not create a wedding cake for less than a starting price of \$350-\$1,000.

(e) Reliability.

Their rating is exceptionally good. Just like the retail bakery, their reputation is on the line with every single wedding cake. The owners typically are very conscientious about every aspect of your wedding cake and go beyond the call of duty to keep you satisfied.

4. HOME CAKE DECORATOR.

This category is tricky. You'll find cake decorators (*Type 1*) who have read a few decorating books and taken a few decorating classes. They may even work at a local bakery and be doing a little moonlighting for extra money. *This person presents the highest amount of risk in the form of being non-health department compliant, additional liability, and over-all problems.*

Then, there are the home decorators (*Type 2*) who are quite skilled and are meticulous about their craft. They have the proper licenses and have taken classes from some of the finest cake designers in the country. Many of these home cake artists win national competitions and you'll even find their work in major magazines. If you're going to use a home decorator, this is the type you'll want to choose.

(a) Cake flavors, fillings, frosting types.

Some individuals offer a tremendous variety rivaling any boutique shop and some only offer the basic selections. It will be completely dependent upon the experience, talent, and options of the individual you are working with.

(b) Variety of wedding cake styles.

The answer is the same as the previous one.

(c) Cake designer's ability.

We found home decorators who were terrible and those who were brilliant. This is where you'll really have to do your homework. If you follow the guidelines provided in this book, you will weed out the imposters and find the experts.

(d) Price.

Usually, you'll pay less. But we did find individuals who actually charged more than a specialty cake store. Due to the fact this group presents a double-edged sword, the trick is to find a talented individual and then incorporate all the safeguards you are learning from this guidebook.

(e) Reliability.

Our research shows this provider (*Type 1*) to be less reliable. Brides stated, problems ranged from went out of business overnight, moved abruptly, forgot about the date, or got sick. Brides also said, this group has the highest incidence of making mistakes, and they are not as willing to refund any portion of your money when they do something wrong.

Question 1-3:	How can I know for sure a Baker/Designer is reputable and reliable? What criteria (questions) can I use (ask) to figure out if a Baker/Designer is reputable?
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In our research:

- 92% of the brides surveyed asked their friends directly or through social media such as Facebook if they knew a good and trustworthy B/D.
- 84% said they trusted a B/D that was at a bridal show.

- 78% said they trusted results from a Google or Yahoo search
- 74 % ask for referrals from other wedding vendors, such as the reception site, church, florist, photographer, or caterer.
- 71% said they trusted a paid advertiser on “the knot” or “WeddingWire.”
- 71% go to a B/D recommended by a parent or friend.

On the low side:

- 41% would consider contacting a B/D who advertised in the local newspaper.
- 40% would use a review site.
- 31% of the brides said they would use an on-line yellow pages.

The research demonstrates how brides look for B/Ds, but it also says a lot about whom they trust. The trust issue is half the battle. If you trust someone, his or her reputation is not as important. Here are a few tips for you:

- Ask your reception site coordinator if they’ve had any bad experiences with the B/D you are thinking about using
- Ask the florist you are using the same question.
- Ask your photographer.
- Finally, ask your caterer, if you are using one.

Any B/D who has been in business for more than five years probably has a good reputation. It is difficult being in business for five years or longer if you are not doing things right.

If the B/D you choose is working out of their home, apartment, out of the back of a restaurant or a warehouse, and they have been in business less than five years, your odds of having a problem go up.

Also, beware of designers or decorators that work for a bakery full-time, but make wedding cakes out of their home in their spare time for a lower price. Brides have told us repeatedly for you to stay away from them.

According to answers from our surveys, the top 5 most likely problems were:

- 1) Using a B/D that works as a cake decorator for a local bakery but decorates on the side out of their home.
- 2) Using a B/D that works from their home premises, without being organized as a legal business structure.
- 3) Using a B/D that has been in business for less than 5 years working from a storefront.
- 4) Using a B/D who is a relative, friend, neighbor, or coworker.
- 5) Using any B/D without some type of written guarantee.



PRICELESS ADVICE: Ask the B/D to give you the names and phone numbers of between three and five brides who have cakes ordered for future dates before yours. Notice how we said future brides, not former brides.

(Read Chapter 10 question 20 on the issue of privacy. A B/D may not be able to obtain permission from every bride for you to contact her.) This technique allows you to call them after the wedding and see how they liked their cake. This method is far better than references. After all, do you really believe they will have displeased brides on their reference list?

Ask the B/D you are considering if they have any testimonials. An astute B/D will capture as many testimonials from brides as possible. Having 50 testimonials clearly shows a pattern of satisfaction.

Question
1-4:

Does it matter how long a baker has been in business?

The person I am choosing has been decorating wedding cakes for 10 years. Is that long enough to get a gorgeous wedding cake?

The typical surface level answer is very transparent. Sure, if a B/D has been around for 10 years you should weigh that factor as relevant. We all know it shows stability, reliability, and commitment. After all, 80% of all businesses are out of business within 5 years. **It stands to reason if a B/D has been in business for 10 years they are certainly doing many things right.**

However, we want you to see this question from a different perspective. If a B/D has been around 10 years, they have encountered hundreds of problems. That is hundreds of solved problems for your benefit. Someone who has been around ten years can help you avoid the problems of former brides. They can pass along sound advice based upon valuable experience you won't get or receive from someone in the business for less than 10 years.

Sure, you can get a gorgeous wedding cake from someone who has been in business for only 2 years. But now you have another piece of the puzzle for considering which B/D you should choose.

Question
1-5:

How much does skill level matter when it comes to decorating wedding cakes?

Should I ask for different styles of cakes they have decorated in the past?

Oh yeah, here's a hot tamale question. This is like asking your fiancée when they are lost, whether they know where they are going. "Oh-h-h, sure I do, honey!"

Let me give you a little insight. Most cake decorators/designers think they can do anything you give them. Cake decorators/designers are artists; they are so-called right-brained people. They love artistic challenges. Especially cake designs you pull-off the Internet. Most of them feel it is embarrassing to admit they are not good enough to do... "THAT" picture.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *I am working on an exclusive rating scale to help brides understand how to tie-together the "design difficulty" of a cake and how it correlates to price. Overall, it helps you know how much skill a cake artist has.*

It would take a whole chapter to explain all the nuances. However, there is good news. I am in the process of putting together a complete video (How Bakeries Price Wedding Cakes) where I pull back the curtain and explain everything in detail.

You'll get a front row seat where I personally tell you everything you need to know, but didn't know to ask. You'll see how the "Design Difficulty" method works. I could give you a release date, but due to Covid, things are out of whack.

Question
1-6:

What should the decorator's qualifications be for designing my cake?

Should I ask who is decorating my cake and what makes them qualified?

Baker/Designers do not require any qualifications, such as a BA in art. That is why we stress to follow the guidelines contained within this book.

For all you know, the person you just hired was shampooing dogs last week. (*Don't laugh. We know of 3 instances.*) And now, they call themselves a "Cake Ar-tiste." (*That's cake artist, in case your French is rusty.*)

The good news is, there is an organization called "The Retail Bakers of America" (RBA) where a decorator can be tested. They can be tested to receive a designation of "Certified Decorator" (CD). This designation is used throughout the entire US.

There are no required state or municipal tests, anywhere. Outside of the RBA, there is only one other organization that tests for a certification. It is called the International Cake Exploration Société (ICES). This organization has members world-wide.

ICES promotes the advancement of the sugar arts. Their members comprise the gambit of cake decorators from "newbie's" to very advanced "sugar artists." Once a year at their annual convention, they offer testing to become a certified sugar artist or a certified master sugar artist. The test to become a master sugar artist is very comprehensive. If a B/D claims to be an ICES certified master sugar artist, they are very good.

We did locate grocery store chains and bakeries that have standardized testing for job applicants. However, most of the time, the standardized testing was for entry-level skill sets. We only found a handful of bakeries that tested applicants for advanced skilled sets.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *If you find a B/D who has been certified from the RBA (rbanet.com) titled a "Certified Decorator" (CD) or ICES as a "Master Sugar Artist" you can feel confident they are committed to the cake decorating field and possess a high-degree level of skill.*

With that said, we caution you about assuming their artistic abilities are equal to a "16th Century Master Painter!" The point here is, do not short-cut the help offered in this guide because someone has a certification or belongs to a cake decorating organization.

Question
1-7:

Are 5 or 10 references or testimonials enough for me to feel comfortable?
Are testimonials on Facebook, Google, or the Knot worth considering?

This question is a slippery slope. Instead, it is far better to read or hear testimonials from brides spread out over the last 5 years, instead of asking for a list of possibly baited references, or testimonials on Facebook, Google reviews or the Knot.

Testimonials or reviews, over a period of time, demonstrate a consistent pattern of great cakes from the B/D. References should come from current customers or vendors as well as past ones.

A better path to follow is taking the recommendation from "Priceless Advice" at the end of question 1-3.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *If a B/D has other vendors as references, it may not be a true measurement of how good they are.*

In our research about 2 in 5 B/Ds have strategic alliances with caterers, reception halls, hotels, country clubs, florists, churches, photographers, limo services, rental companies, and formal wear companies. This means they may shell out \$\$\$ to get customers.

For example, if a B/D has an arrangement with a banquet manager at a country club to send them all their wedding clients, the B/D may pay the banquet manager or country club 10% of the cake's invoice.

On a \$1,000 order, the club or banquet manager receives \$100. Do you think that might impair their judgment about letting a certain amount of crummy (I couldn't help myself) cakes slide by? Don't get me wrong, I'm not being critical, I'm simply saying keep an open mind.

Question
1-8:

Should I choose a Baker/Designer who does 1 or 10 wedding cakes per weekend? Does it even matter?

On average, how many wedding cake orders do you do per weekend?

You can read about the pros and cons of which B/D is best for you in question 1-2. This particular question relates to understanding why a B/D is busy or not and whether it is an indication they could be a crummy or great B/D.

If a small B/D makes only one wedding cake per weekend, it's perfectly fine. It could be that's all the time they have working by themselves. The real question is, are they making one wedding cake every weekend or just one cake per month? **If they say they can handle your order because they only have one wedding in the next 3 weeks, it should raise a red flag and give you reason to pause.** I am not saying this is the only criteria to use, but it should be a consideration.

If a larger B/D is only making one, two, or three wedding cakes per weekend, you might want to think twice. Such as, why don't they have more orders? Could it be they just are not that good?

If a larger B/D is doing 10, 20, or 30 per weekend, they probably are very good at what they do, and you can feel fairly confident the prices of their wedding cakes are reasonable.

It is uncommon for a busy B/D to be over-priced or let's say unreasonably priced. Also keep in mind, a B/D who does 10 or 20 wedding cakes per weekend typically has the staff to promptly fix problems with your cake or anyone else's.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *We've heard negative stories about wedding cake creators who bake 1 or 2 wedding cakes per week. There seemed to be one common theme. When someone called the store or shop, there was no one available to come back and fix the cake or worse, they got an answering machine. Our advice is to be sure you whoever you choose will be available for emergencies. Have their phone number on speed dial, and use it, if necessary.*

Question
1-9:

Should I ask how many wedding cakes they do a year? How many is enough?

Does it really make a difference if one Baker/Designer does five times the wedding cakes of another Baker/Designer?

This gives you a minimum guideline to follow. It helps you understand how much experience the B/D has. It also tells you how much demand there is for their service.

Here's a simple rule-of-thumb. **If they do at least 40 wedding cakes a year, they should be on top of their game.** Forty cakes a year allows a B/D to stay polished and increase their skill sets.

Of course, there are B/Ds who do hundreds or thousands per year. It doesn't mean they are better than the B/D who does forty.

Question
1-10:

Is it worth my time to go to bridal shows and meet Baker/Designers?

Is it true that bridal shows are a great way to find a Baker/Designer?

The overwhelming answer according to our brides is YES!

However, when we surveyed B/Ds whether they were involved with at least one bridal show per year in their trade area, 80% said no! This means you won't see or meet 80% of the B/Ds at any shows.

Let me give you a little inside scoop about bridal shows. **The smallest B/Ds or the ones whose sales are slacking the most are usually the ones you'll find at smaller bridal shows.** Why? They don't have a way for most brides to find them. Many of them work out of their homes, a shared catering facility, or small shop.

At a bridal show, they hope you will judge them on their artistic work and form an opinion before you actually see where they produce your cake. A bridal show brings the brides to them. They cannot afford to pay \$500 or more a month for Internet, social media advertising, or advertising in local bridal magazines. A bridal show gives them an opportunity to shine.

Larger B/Ds typically represent themselves at larger or major bridal shows. Their strategy for being in bigger shows is to "brand" themselves in your mind. They don't get that kind of "*bang-for-their-buck*" at smaller intimate bridal shows. They want you to remember them when it is time to start shopping for your wedding cake. They know it is hard to sell you at a bridal show, so they entice you to set-up a consultation at your leisure.

If 80% of B/Ds do not use bridal shows to demonstrate their expertise, you'll have to combine this method with other search methods to seek for a more diverse selection of B/Ds.

Question
1-11:

I work all the time. Do you have a simple formula I can use to hire a good Baker/Designer?

I don't have a lot of time to shop around; how do I find someone that is convenient for me while still doing a great job?

Our surveys have shown: Either **locate a "Gold Standard Baker"** or:

- 92% of the brides surveyed asked their friends directly or through social media such as Facebook if they knew a good and trustworthy B/D.
- 84% said they trusted a B/D that was at a bridal show.
- 78% said they trusted results from a Google or Yahoo search

If you follow just those four referral methods, 83% of the surveyed brides were happy with the referred B/D. That is an amazing statistic. How much easier can it be?

<p>Question 1-12:</p>	<p>Is it a correct assumption a Baker/Designer will do a fabulous job on my cake if they have been published in magazines, newspapers, or seen on TV? Should I ask if their wedding cakes have been published in any magazines, newspapers, or seen on TV?</p>
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You would think if a B/D has been published in a magazine or they are seen on the TV, they must be pretty good to get that kind of attention.

Sorry to say, you would be only about 30% correct.

The reality is 60% are advertisers to the publication. The publisher is happy to print photos and articles submitted by the bakeries that help them collect their paychecks.

The remaining 10% of the time, the B/D is a friend of a writer, editor, publisher, producer, or newsperson. In those cases, the photos, accompanying articles, or interview, are probably being published as a favor, not because of artistic achievement.

Here's the key: **If money and friends are not involved, then a B/D probably impressed the right people to get into a magazine, newspaper, or on TV.**



Eye-Opening Topic 2 – Pricing

Understanding Prices for Wedding Cakes Can Be Challenging. Here's How to Buy the Perfect Wedding Cake Without Overpaying. (Hint: It's not what you think.)

Pricing is always a hot topic of interest. In our interview process, some brides felt they received an excellent value, and some felt...well, as if they were...gouged. With the help of this section, you should have a crystal-clear picture of pricing. More importantly, what you will be willing to pay for.

Here's the key ingredient for purchasing a wedding cake or almost anything from a salesperson. It's called PERSONALITY.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *We prefer to buy from people we know, like, and trust. It has been proven time and time again, a charismatic person selling an inferior product or service can outsell a good salesperson with a superior product or service.*

To prove the point: The largest volume car salesperson of all time said his secret to success was summed up with one simple strategy, “get the person to like me as quickly as possible.” (*In psychological terms, it is called the “liking principle.”*)

Just think, don't you like working with someone who cares about you, someone who will listen, someone who is likable, and you feel as though you would ask her or him to watch your dog or cat while

you head off to the Bahamas for your honeymoon? Of course, you do. We all feel that way. It's human nature.

However, there within lies the rub. **Generally, we are willing to pay more for a wedding cake (or anything else) from a person or business who we...*know, like, and trust.***

We're not suggesting you don't buy from someone that has these three critical attributes. However, from now on, keep this lesson in mind as you shop for your wedding cake or any other purchase.

The key to buying the picture-perfect wedding cake without overpaying or paying a price that seems too good to be true, is paying for value (*value meaning the combination of the expertise, product, and their price*) instead of falling in love with their dynamic personality and wind-up getting a less than desirable wedding cake.

Make sure you use unbiased guidelines to dictate where and who you buy from.

There are many outstanding B/Ds who do not have the greatest personalities or seem to be a little quirky. Never-the-less, it doesn't mean they lack talent or will provide less than ample attention to your cake.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *Research has shown you can save money (get a better price) if you role-play your purchase. (This won't work for buying a wedding cake, but it does on many other products or services.) You either need to be very nice or at the other end of the spectrum, be demanding and somewhat rude.*

Question
2-1:

How much should I budget for the wedding cake?

Can you tell me what the general rule-of-thumb is to budget for the cake?

The simple answer is somewhere between 3%-5% of your overall wedding budget. As an example, if you are putting \$10,000 toward your wedding, then setting aside \$300-\$500 for your wedding cake is a good average. If you have resources of \$20,000 then a \$600-\$1,000 cake is in line.

Initially, we conducted surveys across the country based on six geographic regions: Northeast, Southeast, Upper Midwest, Lower Midwest, Northwest, and Southwest. We gathered price samplings from each region to formulate a generalized regional price average for each of the six regions.

As it turns out, our model didn't work. To illustrate my point, a cake that was produced in Miami, FL for 150 servings at a cost of \$900 was also produced in Charleston, SC for \$750. Both states are in the Southeast region, but the demographics of the citizens are different. As another example, a cake designed in New York City at a price of \$2,500 for 125 servings was reproduced in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania for \$625. Again, both states are in the Northeast region, but the demographics were completely different.

What **we did find was a correlation between higher prices in larger cities and lower prices in less populated cities**. This forced us to rethink the regional pricing strategy and change it to a pricing model according to relative populations anywhere in the US. As an example, it is a better comparison of price between Kansas City, KS and Memphis, TN than Charleston, SC and Miami, FL.

If you really want to know the current prices in your area, do the following: Go to a couple of B/Ds who appear to be out of your price range. Then, go to a couple that are priced in the middle, and finally, go to a couple of lower priced B/Ds. After visiting them, you'll know within a \$100 what you can expect to pay.

ATTENTION: "Quote Services" will hopefully be available in select cities for wedding cakes beginning the spring-summer of 2023.

It will be a FREE service to help you compare bakers and prices of one baker with another for the same wedding cake photo(s) from the comfort of your laptop or cell phone.

The service is an app called "Wedding Cake Wizard." You'll be able to download it from the Google Play store, as well from iTunes for Apple devices.

Question	What is a general and reasonable price range for wedding cakes?
2-2:	How much can I expect to pay for an average wedding cake?

At this point, you should realize there is not a (*single*) general price range, but up to four general price ranges for wedding cakes. Yes, each group of B/Ds will have their own price range. As an example, you need to compare one grocery store bakery against another grocery store bakery to come up with a general price range for grocery stores. You will need to follow the same procedure to come up with a general price range for "Boutique" Cake shops and so on.

If you live in a smaller community where there are only two types of B/Ds, you will still need to follow the same procedure. Obviously, you'll have only two prices ranges.

Depending on which websites you visit, you'll dig up all kinds of price ranges. You may have even stumbled across an overall average price for wedding cakes across the United States of \$575 for 2021

While doing research for this answer, we contacted some of the high-profile bridal wedding sites to find out where they obtained some of their wedding cake prices. Either we couldn't get an answer, or they claimed from local contacts. We are going to give you the only researched price range in existence at the end of this answer. First, we need to rant a little.

WHAT? Without going off the deep end, you've got to be kidding! Experts are throwing prices out on the world-wide web for millions to see and a local contact is the best they can do.

Let me explain the correct way to answer this question. Without getting philosophical, **a reasonable price to one person could be outrageous to another.**

Like the price of a house on the coast of California and Florida or one in Yankton, South Dakota, the same house could be \$999,000 or \$99,000. Does the house in California seem unreasonably priced at \$999,000? It depends, right?

Price is determined by each B/D. ***There is no standardized price or generalized price list for average cakes across the US.*** There isn't a hidden vault with a secret price list like the recipe to Coca Cola.

Each B/D sets their prices according to the perceived value they bring to the marketplace for a given area of the country. As stated before, larger cities often allow B/Ds to price their cakes higher than smaller communities. Of course, there are always exceptions, but this is true 95% of the time.

Also, *the more “in-demand” a B/D is, the higher their prices will be.* It is a simple law of supply and demand. If they are good and well known with a stellar reputation, they always charge more. Nevertheless, you could say they are charging a “reasonable” price.

Okay, here we go. **There is no, we repeat, no such thing as an average reasonable price range.** You cannot make a sweeping generalization on pricing wedding cakes without taking into account the four different groups of BD’s. Until these national bridal wedding sites get it right, their advice is very suspect.

Below is a list of prices that has actual research behind it to give you a realistic price range.

Twenty-seven “Gold Standard Wedding Cake Bakers” gave my research team names for B/Ds in their area of the country to make sure all four groups of B/D’s were represented. A total of 147 B/Ds were contacted between June 2021 and September 2021.

Please keep in mind these are averages from around the US. There were lower prices and there were high prices for each B/D group. These prices ranges reflect 80% of the available cakes B/Ds offered. As a matter of interest, we posted the lowest prices and highest prices we were given for each group.

- 1. Grocery store bakeries. Average:** \$2.25 to \$6.00 per serving
(Lowest: \$1.75 Highest: \$ 11.50)
- 2. Retail bakeries. Average:** \$2.50 to \$10.00 per serving
(Lowest: \$1.75 Highest: \$ 23.50)
- 3. Specialty cake shop or boutique cake store. Average** \$3.00 to \$25.00 per serving
(Lowest: \$2.50 Highest: \$ 28.00)
- 4. Home decorator. Average** \$1.50 to \$15.00 per serving
(Lowest: \$.75 Highest: \$20.00)

Question
2-3:

How will I know if I am being overcharged?

How can I tell when a Baker/Designer is sticking it to me?

Here is the short version to answer this question. *If you like or love what you see, it tastes great, and you are willing to pay the price, you are not being overcharged.*

That’s the great thing about America...*competition*. If you shop 6 different B/Ds, it will quickly become apparent what value you will receive for a certain amount of money you are willing to dish out. Also, look at it like this; **you are only being overcharged if someone or company deceives you or intentionally rips you off.** (See *Eye-Opening Topics 10: OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZS.*) Unless you don’t get what you paid for, you’re not being overcharged.

Sometimes people have a tendency to confuse “paying too much” with “overcharged.” We have spoken to many brides who paid too much, but did not get overcharged.

Question
2-4:

What is included when you buy a wedding cake?

What is typically included in the price of a wedding cake?

That is the \$64,000 question. Without sounding like a broken record, the question needs to be looked at from a perspective of “value.” Here’s why. You still need to compare apples to apples. You need to find out what you get for the prices according to the four groups of B/Ds. The value you receive is determined primarily by the style of decorating you choose.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *Approximately 70%-80% of the price for your wedding cake revolves around how your cake is decorated. The complexity of design and the materials in the creation of the design have the largest bearing on the overall price. Essentially, you are paying for the skill required to create your design and the hours of labor to implement the design on your cake.*

Here’s another simple way for you to judge price or value. The first B/D you contact becomes the base line for the rest of your research to find a B/D you want to use. Some will be priced higher and some lower. You then visit them to understand the real value they have to offer. By the time you are finished, you will be paying a B/D based upon value instead of a perceived price.

Question
2-5:

I need a cake for 150 servings. What will make it more expensive?

What items do Baker/Designers typically charge extra for?

The answer; just about everything. Some B/Ds detail every little item as an addition to a base price, whereas other B/Ds bundle everything together as one price. The only way you can compare two B/Ds is to look at the total price of everything you want and then decide on the best value. Typically, there are seven areas/categories that could change the price of your wedding cake:

- 1) Size.
- 2) Shape of cakes.
- 3) Type or flavor of cake.
- 4) If you want a filling.
- 5) Type of frosting.
- 6) How the cake is “set-up;” meaning the tiers could be stacked one on top of another, they could be separated, they could be spread out on different sized platforms, or through some other elaborate means.
- 7) Decoration. 70%-80% of the price is usually reflected in the decoration.

To expand on the 7 area/categories; here are the 11 common extras B/Ds charge extra for:

- 1) Any cake other than white (vanilla) cake.
- 2) Any sort of filling in or on the cake including fresh fruit.
- 3) Any frosting other than buttercream. Such as fondant or modeling chocolate.
- 4) Any ornament or topper for the bride’s or groom’s cake.
- 5) Any platform or structure that needs to be built to support the cake.
- 6) A scheduled delivery and a higher fee for far away deliveries.
- 7) Elegant designs that take extra time or skill.
- 8) Photos from the Internet.
- 9) Fresh or any type of sugar-paste handmade flowers.

- 10) Handmade items for the cake.
- 11) Exceptionally large cakes.

If you are on a tight budget, a boutique B/D probably will be out of your price range. For the most part, their wedding cakes are designed using fondant, pulled sugar, or other exotic “sugar pastes.”

One of the questions you will ask in your interview process will be, “Of the wedding cakes you decorate, how many of them are in regular butter cream versus other frostings?” Another question needs to be, “What is your average cost per serving for your wedding cakes?” *(If all you can afford is \$3.00 per serving and they answer, “Our prices begin at \$5.00 per serving... I think you get the picture.)*

Question
2-6:

What does it mean when a Baker/Designer charges by the slice?
Why do Baker/Designers charge by the slice?

About 85% of B/Ds charge by the slice, while 15% charge according to total servings.

Charging **by the slice** is a simple way for you to understand pricing and it keeps it simple for the B/D. If you are undecided about getting a cake that serves 75, 100, or 150 servings at \$5 per serving, you can quickly calculate prices of \$375, \$500, or \$750.

If a B/D charges **by total servings**, the calculation of cost for the same three cakes of 75, 100, or 150 servings could be dramatically different. For example, the cake could start out at \$5 per serving for 75 servings as in the first example, but at 100 servings the price drops to \$4.50 per serving and at 150 servings, the price drops to \$4 per servings. So, 150 servings from this baker for the same cake in the first example would be \$600 instead of \$750.

Why do their prices drop as the cake gets larger? Because a 150 serving cake does not take twice as long to produce as a 75 serving cake. These bakers feel charging for time and material is a more honest pricing model.

Why do only 15% of the B/Ds charge by total servings? They believe charging by the slice is “overcharging” their clients. The other 85% say customers understand and prefer the per slice method of pricing. I’ll admit, it is almost impossible to post wedding cakes on the Internet using the **by total servings** method without completely confusing prospective brides.

Question
2-7:

Why are there such large price swings from one Baker/Designer to another?
Why does it seem like one Baker/Designer is trying to gouge me and the other is being more reasonable?

Read question 2 from section 1 and questions 2, 3, and 4 from this section to gain a good understanding.

In addition, we are going to add the following: it is called **overhead coupled with profit margin**. Let’s take a real case study we examined to explain price differences. In Dallas, Texas, we compared two B/Ds with only one expense: leasing rates. B/D #1 is paying \$3,500 per month for 4000 square feet and B/D #2 is paying \$8,000 per month for about the same square footage.

Who do you think had the higher priced wedding cakes? Who do you think was making a larger profit margin?

As it turns out, B/D #2's prices were 26% higher than B/D #1. Even with the 26% higher price, B/D #1 was still making 18% more profit.

So, who was really charging more? Who had the appearance of gouging their brides?

We didn't research other expenses, but it illustrates how and why B/Ds charge different prices for basically the same product.

It isn't that B/D #2 is greedy; they simply have much higher expenses and need to price their wedding cakes accordingly.

In this case, "you usually get what you pay for" doesn't apply. Both of the B/Ds are very skilled craftspeople and satisfy hundreds of brides every year.

Question	Can I have something unique and memorable while not breaking the bank?
2-8:	Can I get something really cool without selling my wedding ring to pay for it?

What is unique and memorable to you could be hideous and forgettable to someone else. Your idea of unique could be a design that is very simple but elegant. The price shouldn't break the bank in this instance.

Just don't trick yourself into believing you can replicate a very ornate design or a design that uses unusual materials and not break the bank.

Your best chances to keep the price reasonable and have a unique design is to have the cake designed with decorations that only take a minimal amount of skill, but arranged in a unique way.

Here's a couple of tricks designers use to make moderately priced cakes look unique and more expensive.

The first method is to combine different shapes of cakes together. For example, for a 200 serving tiered cake, a designer will use a square cake on the bottom, then a round cake, then a square cake and finally a round cake. Or a designer will take square cakes and offset them at 60° angles.

The second method is to tint the icing with color. For example, they will frost the whole cake in darker ivory and complete the decoration in a lighter ivory. This gives the cake a rich look and an interesting two-tone effect. Either cake can then be decorated with simple designs to keep the cost down.

If you find a caring B/D, just ask them what you can do to keep the price of the cake down, while still having something unique. If they have the qualities we discuss at the beginning of this book, they will be glad to assist you.

Remember, there are typically seven areas/categories that could change the price of your wedding cake.

Question
2-9:

How can I save money ordering a wedding cake?

I am on a tight budget. What tips can you give me to keep down the cost of the wedding cake?

Take a look at each category and keep it to a bare minimum.

- 1) Size. *(Small as possible. Get a cake for around 70% of your guests.)*
- 2) Shape of cake. *(Keep the tiers either round or square.)*
- 3) Type or flavor of cake. *(Keep it plain, such as all vanilla.)*
- 4) If you want a filling. *(Do not order any.)*
- 5) Type of frosting. *(Use whatever frosting the B/D offers that does not cost extra. Have your cake frosted in white or if they don't charge extra for a colored frosting have it colored to match one of your bridal colors.)*
- 6) How the cake is "set-up;" meaning the tiers could be stacked one on top of another, they could be separated, they could be spread out on a tube stand, or through some other elaborate means. *(Get a stacked cake with no separators.)*
- 7) Decoration. 70%-80% of the price is usually reflected in the decoration. *(Select a design that only takes minimal skills to produce. Use frosting flowers instead of fresh ones. Do not buy a wedding cake topper. Instead, have your B/D make frosting flowers.)*

Here are some other ideas to save money provided by the answer to "Topic 4: question 8."

Traditional wedding cake has evolved over the last 20 years from white wedding cake with a classic decorating style into other dessert ideas. In our interviews and research, we found a few interesting ideas to save money and be different. They are:

- 1) Buying a smaller wedding cake and having your aunt or grandma make additional sheet cakes to serve.
- 2) Buying mini-donuts and piling them up to form a white-looking wedding cake.
- 3) Going to McDonalds and buying hundreds of dollar apple and cherry pies as a dessert to be used in place of a traditional wedding cake. The cost, \$1.00 per serving.
- 4) Buying Twinkies at the day-old store. You sprinkle powdered sugar on them and place them on trays. The cost, about 65¢ per piece.
- 5) Serving plain frosted cupcakes, notice I said plain, not decorated, and placed on a cupcake stand that can be rented at a rental store. The cost about \$1.00-\$2.75 per serving.
- 6) Serving cookies with your initials on them. The cost, as low as \$1.00-\$1.50 per serving.
- 7) Placing a plain 8" cake on each table or grouping of 10 people. The cost, as low as \$1.75 per serving.
- 8) Buy plain cupcakes and let your guests dip them in frosting and then in candies or other sweets. The cost, as low as \$1.50 per serving.
- 9) Delivery: Pick it up yourself or send a friend.

Question
2-10:

Is it possible to negotiate the price?

Is there a way to get the wedding cake for less than the quoted price?

Most of the time, you cannot negotiate the price. For example, if you price a wedding cake at a grocery store or a bakery with published prices, typically their prices are set in stone.

Most B/Ds will have displays and images of their previous work. These wedding cakes are already priced based upon their experience of making those particular cakes. They price them according to a difficulty factor (required skill), materials, and time.

There are two circumstances where you might be able to negotiate price; **First, anytime a B/D says they can create something “original” for you** and second, when **you bring in a photo from any other source such as a magazine, the web, or another B/D**. In both of those cases, the B/D has to estimate their price based upon difficulty (skill required), materials and time.

Question

Is it okay to get price quotes over the phone?

2-11:

What pitfalls should I be looking for while getting price quotes over the phone?

Well sort of...*I want you to think about buying a wedding cake like shopping for a car.*

Let's say you call a Hyundai dealership and start asking them how much they charge for the different models they have on the lot, and you are told they vary between \$14,000 and \$36,000. Then, you call a Ferrari dealership, and they tell you they vary between \$125,000 and \$335,000.

You begin to think, how can there be that much price difference? Don't they both have an engine, four wheels, and a digital sound system?

Are you getting my point? Wedding cakes are the same. There are Hyundai's and there are Ferrari's. Which can you afford? So, to answer your question, calling on the phone for prices is only a good idea to the extent it allows you to know where you should shop.

You must go to the different cake shops to SEE what they offer. The visualization of seeing their work and speaking with a person to understand what they offer is not only far superior to asking for prices over the phone, but a mandatory step you must perform. Otherwise, the price you receive over the phone leaves you sort of clueless.

NOTICE: There is a new innovative wedding cake service being released in early 2023. It allows you to upload 4 of your favorite wedding cake photos to receive prices from bakers in your city and surrounding area.

The service is an app called “Wedding Cake Wizard.”

- Compare the prices of well-known as well as unfamiliar wedding cake artists inside a 50-mile radius of your city without having to drive all over.
- Identify which wedding cake designs are within your price range.
- Know which wedding cake artists have your date available, have the skill to create the designs you've submitted and fit into your budget.
- Stay anonymous. No baker will receive your contact information, but you'll receive theirs. Contact them only if you're interested and at your convenience.

Question
2-12:

On average, how much do wedding cake prices rise a year? I am getting married in about a year; should I order now to save money or wait?

I hear the price of all ingredients for cakes has skyrocketed over the last year. Should I wait to see if wedding cake prices drop, or should I go ahead and order now? My wedding is about a year away.

The oldest price information we gathered for this book dates back to 1967. The average price for a 200 serving wedding cake in 1967 was \$129. Today, that same cake would sell for around \$675.

However, we have seen the prices of wedding cakes escalate at a higher rate over the last five years.

The reason is, brides are expecting a higher degree of creativity and wanting more costly types of cake flavors and fillings than a simple white cake of ten years ago.

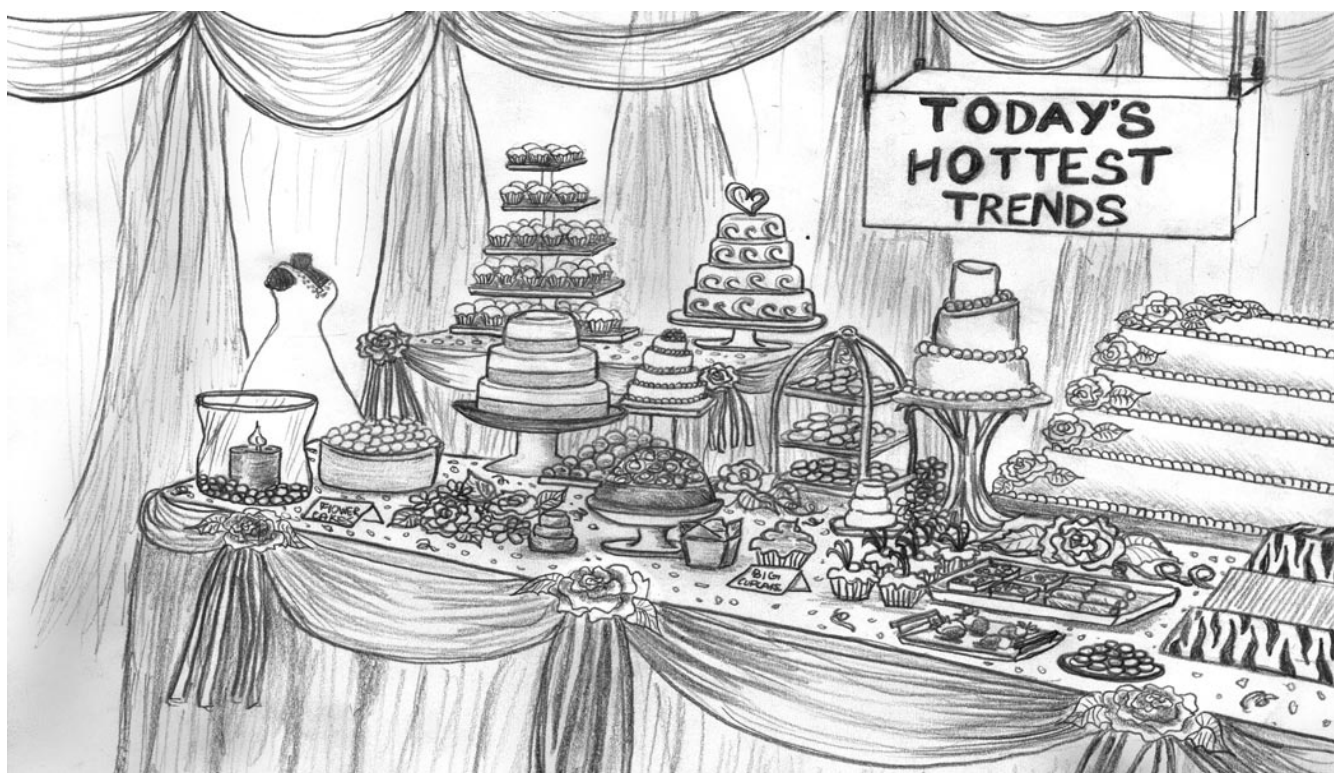
In our surveys, B/Ds responded by letting us know they plan on increasing prices in the 10%-15% price range over the course of 2022, due to the inflationary pressures of labor, materials and overhead expenses caused by Covid and the related supply chain issues.

The only reason prices have not risen more is competition. There are almost 4 times as many individuals making wedding cakes as ten years ago. The increased competition has kept prices in check.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *If you have your mind madeup, book your wedding now and lock in current prices. Typically, if you order within 30 days of a quoted price, most B/Ds will honor it for the next 12 months.*

Between the devastating effects of Covid-19, its variants, and the coming inflationary pressures, we suggest ordering as soon as possible.



Eye-Opening Topic 3 —Today's Hottest Trends

Get The Hottest Wedding Cake Trends from Coast to Coast. Check Out This Section to Make Sure Your Baker/Designer Is Providing Ideas For 2022-2023.

Most of us like to keep up-to-date on the world of fashion. We want to know what's "in" and what's "out." Over the course of the last 7 years, wedding cake designers have also jumped on the bandwagon.

It isn't good enough for a "great" wedding cake B/D to create displays and sell them for the next 3 years. **Now, you are seeing new designs being set out in display areas every up-coming season, and even as every six months.**

With the help of the Internet, brides and B/Ds alike are searching for ideas. Everyone is looking for the next great inspiration. The information you'll be reading in this section is the consensus view of what's expected to be hot for 2022-2023.

Question

3-1:

What are the hot new ideas and styles for 2022-2023?

I want to have a design that reflects today's style. What are they?

In years past, the hot new wedding cake ideas and styles were set by the "Wilton" company out of Chicago. They were the true innovators and cake decorating experts from the early 70's through 2010.

Today, the trends are set more by wedding conglomerates such as the knot, Weddingwire, and dress designers. With "the knot" "Pinterest," all the cable cake shows and the worldwide web, cake designs change as often as dress designs.

Obviously, you can Google the hottest wedding cake trends for 2022 or go to Pinterest to see what people are posting, but our take is a little different. **Our polling is conducted directly with 350 bakers across the country, not the media giants who attempt to control the narrative.**

A good example of this is, “Pressed Flowers.” Pressed flowers are dried flowers pressed onto your wedding cake. “Brides” magazine says pressed flowers are a hot wedding cake design for 2022.

The reality is, polling 350 wedding cake bakers in every corner of the US, only 8 said pressed flowers was being requested or an actual thing.

Here’s what wedding cake bakers are really saying will be “in” for 2022-2023.

It begins with styles: The buzzwords for the next couple of years will be *Boho, Modern Minimalistic, Two-Tier, Bold, and Painted.*

First let’s take “Boho.” Today, the term boho wedding cake describes a cake with an unconventional, color scheme and design. Often it encompasses trends from the hippie era when the aesthetic was similar to the bohemians. That means, weird triangles, squares, circles, swirls, and lines in different directions. But it also has a second meaning: It can also be everything within the organic influence of earthy tones, greenery, dried flowers, and jewel tones colors. Either way, makes for an interesting design. *(Boho is relatively new and will probably be around for the next few years.)*

Second is “Minimalistic.” Minimalistic means a simple decorated cake. It typically consists of textured (roughed-up, vertical or horizontal swipes, or another annotation using the frosting to frost the cake) frosting on all the tiers and then adding fresh or silk flowers, or some greenery. That’s it! *(Minimalistic began in 2020, during the first year of Covid. It was a way to save money and is still prevalent today. We expect to stay around for the foreseeable future.)*

Third, is “Two-Tier,” which is using a 2-tiered cake for the wedding party and serving sheet cakes (also called kitchen cakes) to serve the guests. The decoration can range from “Minimalistic” to very ornate. *(This also began during the Covid outbreak. It was a way to save money, because sheet cakes cost less than a tiered cake, plus it was seen as a safer way to serve cake.)*

Fourth is “Bold.” Bold wedding cakes are exactly what you think they mean. The design is loud and unmistakably prominent. They contain vivid or ornate designs that catch the eye that make a statement. In essence, they are the opposite of minimalistic.

Fifth is “Painted.” Painted means taking edible watercolor and painting the frosting on the cake in a single color or multiple colors. It can also mean to paint a scene of flowers, buildings, a rendition of a famous painting, or a landscape scenery. In other words, your cake becomes the canvas. *(This trend has been around for about the last 3 years and appears it will stay for some time to come.)*

Colors like trends are set by wedding conglomerates such as the knot, Weddingwire, Pantone color Institute, and dress designers. Expect them to change each and every year. There’s no such thing as a trend in colors for the wedding industry.

Hot Colors: Once again, here's what our 350 wedding cake bakers are reporting versus what you're seeing or reading about in other media outlets.

It appears there are two identifiable colors palettes.

The first are muted colors, especially in blues and lavenders. They are seeing a lot of requests for "Dusty Lavendar" or "Dusty Blue," which are essentially lavender or blue with a tinge of brown. The second are the neutral earth tone colors in browns and greens.

Aside from the two hot color sets, jewel tone and metallics like gold and silver are being used about 20% of the time.

For the remaining colors, here are the variations.

Yellow: It seems as if either yellow is very bright or very pale. There does not seem to be any middle ground.

Red: Where red was a hot color just a few years ago, very few brides are using it in 2022 and 2023.

Orange: Orange is an interesting color. It is the least used color for any purpose including weddings. So, don't expect to see much of it, except in the fall.

Purple: The purples are leaning toward a blueish-purple, dusty lavender, or a bright jewel tone.

Pink: The hues are leaning more to the purplish side of the color spectrum or any shade of muted pink.

Neutral: Neutral colors don't get talked about much because they don't change. They work fine by themselves or with combinations of colors. Colors to consider are black, white, silver, gold, pewter, ivory, platinum, and champagne.

Our bakers want you to know, there are no wrong colors, just personal preferences.

Flowers: Fresh flowers are still the hot item. In our surveys,

- 61% of brides are using fresh flowers on or around their wedding cake,
- 12% are using some type of "sugar paste" flowers, such as gum paste or fondant. (That has doubled from just 3 years ago.)
- 13% won't be using any kind of flowers.
- 9% are using silk flowers,
- 5% are using frosting butter cream flowers, and

Your budget, time of year, and where you live will also play a part in your decision for which flowers you choose.

For many couples who are "earth-friendly" or "green," having vines, leaves or green plants on and around your wedding cake is becoming more popular. Being "green" is a way for you to be earth friendly and save money on fresh blooms.

Platforms: Platforms (cake stands) that lift your entire cake off the table are really picking up in popularity. Over the past 3 years their use is up 20% nationwide. The only problem is lack of choice.

Platform designs are still very limited unless a B/D has fabricated their own collection. Consequently, most B/Ds don't carry very much variety for you to choose from. You'll have the same problem if you go to a rental store.

Themed Decorations: A certain number of brides transform their reception space into some type of theme. Popular choices are Hawaiian, Disney, the ocean, castles, and western. The wedding cake is designed to be complementary to the theme. Although themed wedding cakes are at the height of their popularity, they are still only a fraction of the overall wedding cake market.

Cake Flavors: Over the course of the last 10 years the traditional white cake is on its last leg. We are seeing an average of around 10% of the brides choosing vanilla, yellow, or chocolate cake. The other 90% are ordering a myriad of flavors depending on what part of the country the reception is being held.

Question
3-2:

Are cupcakes still in? Or is the trend over?

I am thinking about getting cupcakes instead of a normal wedding cake because I hear it is the "in" thing to do and everyone is getting them. Is this true?

Cupcake popularity is still high compared to 10 years ago.

Our latest survey results reported that around 20 out of 100 brides order cupcakes for their wedding reception.

The reason more brides have not jumped on the trend is due to brides figuring out cupcakes do not cost less than purchasing a customary wedding cake. Wedding cupcakes tend to average between \$2.50-\$10.00 each.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *The largest benefit of choosing cupcakes is the multiplicity of potential flavors. As an example, a standard 4-tier 150 serving cake supplies you with a maximum of 4 flavors. If you order 150 cupcakes, you may be able to order 5, 10, or 15 flavors depending on the limitations of the B/D you choose.*

Question
3-3:

I've heard small 1 or 2 tier cakes for each individual table is "in." Why should or shouldn't I choose this arrangement over one traditional 3 or 4-tiered wedding cake?

I am having 25 tables of 8 people per table. I am thinking about individual tiered cakes on each table. Can you tell me the pros and cons of doing that versus having a more traditional wedding cake?

Our research concludes they have increased in popularity due to Covid-19. Due to social distancing, having a cake to serve each table eliminates a certain degree of spread. Our bakers told us they are receiving orders for individual table cakes at a rate of approximately 1 in 18 orders. While the number is relatively low, using an individual cake or cupcakes for each table is a worthy consideration.

Here are the advantages: Aside from Covid, if you would like many different flavors of cake, individual cakes grant your wish. They are easier to cut and serve. Also, you can choose one style of decorating to keep the theme consistent throughout the entire venue or you can decorate each cake differently allowing you to utilize many different designs to make your reception room look more interesting.

Here are the disadvantages: First of all, you'll miss two photo opts. One being, you won't have a photo of what is considered the "focal point" of the reception for you or your guests. Another, you won't have the chance to take photos of smashing cake in your spouse's face, another tradition. Also, a larger tiered cake allows you to be more creative and elaborate.

To make my point, just think about the wedding cakes you see in cake competitions. They are usually 5, 6 or 7 tiers tall to allow the designer a great deal of latitude for creating a grandiose cake.

The main reason most brides do not consider them is the higher overall price. As an example, 15 two-tiered wedding cakes to serve a total of 150 with an average decoration could be priced around \$100 per cake for a total of \$1500. Then add in the cost of fresh flowers, individual stands, or other decorative pieces, which could easily add another \$200-\$500. The cost of a similarly decorated 4-tiered cake would be priced at \$800-\$1200.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *The largest benefit of choosing several small tiered wedding cakes is the multiplicity of potential flavors, just like cupcakes. If you order 15 two-tiered cakes, you may be able to order up to 15 flavors depending on the limitations of your B/D.*

Question
3-4:

What can you tell me about the practice of renting a dummy (*fake wedding cake that looks real*) wedding cake in place of a real one and serving sheet cakes instead?

Are there bakeries renting their display wedding cakes just for show, but then serving sheets cakes for the guests?

Over the last 5 years, the popularity of using a fake wedding cake for a centerpiece and then using sheet cakes to serve guests was increasing.

In our latest survey of 350 wedding cake providers in September 2021, the trend has reversed and is heading downward.

Renting a dummy cake or what some refer to as "faux" cakes is primarily a vehicle to save money and still have a great looking centerpiece both for your guests and your photo album.

We found the B/Ds who are currently offering this service are selling it in two ways:

- The first one allows you to rent a display “as is” from their shop. The typical cost is \$75-\$300. Then you simply order and pay for any sheet cakes or round cakes to serve your guests.
- The second method allows you to order any wedding cake from a B/Ds inventory. You begin by ordering a real wedding cake in the size, colors, and design of your choice. However, you do not order a flavor for the inside because it is Styrofoam. Again, the edible portion is served from sheet cakes, round cakes, or other desserts of your choice. The typical price is 70% -90% of an actual wedding cake.

We spoke with one bride’s mother who replicated a movie stars wedding cake at a cost of \$2500 using this method. The cost of the remaking the actual cake would have been \$4750. Instead of wedding cake, she served an assortment of French pastries at a cost of \$700. She saved \$1500.

Another bride we spoke with rented a pre-made display from a B/D at a cost of \$125 plus a \$75 delivery and pick-up fee. She ordered a variety of sheet cakes for 150 guests at a cost of \$175. The entire price tag came to \$375.

If she had ordered the same 150 serving tiered cake from the B/D, it would have cost \$900 for the cake and \$50 for the delivery for a total cost of \$950. In this case, she saved \$575.

There is one major caveat. Over 80% of the B/Ds we contacted don’t rent their wedding displays.

You can also rent them with the help of the Internet. Google “*Fake Wedding Cake*” or “*Faux Wedding Cake.*” They’ll ship one right to you.

Question
3-5:

What do you think about using “Facebook” to get feedback about choosing the flavors of my wedding cake?

Is using “Facebook” a good idea to get a consensus for choosing the flavors of my wedding cake?

It is true, on-line polling for wedding cake flavors is taking place through the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Brides.com.

In our research, we found asking friends and family for their opinions, is NOT the way to go.

Here’s why. Think about all the times in your life you have asked the opinion of others about something important to you or to help you make a decision. How many times do you follow their advice?

Come on, be honest. That’s right, very few. You typically go with your gut feeling.

The real reason you ask for other opinions is to validate your own thoughts. You want others to agree with you. And when they don’t, you become even more indecisive. In the end, you still go with what you think is the correct decision.

When it comes to polling your friends and family for wedding cake flavors, the problem becomes even more complicated.

It's one thing to ask your friends to help you choose a wedding cake design among ten photos. In that particular polling question, the photos are finished. Your friends are now giving their opinions on a finished product they can see. It's either yes or no for each photo.

In the case of cake flavors, you could get their feedback from a total of ten flavors, having them choose the top four. However, there is a double problem. First, if you list a flavor like ??? or ???, your friends probably don't have a clue what it is or tastes like, unless they have had it before.

Second, most of the people taking the survey were not with you when you were test-tasting your sample cakes. So, they don't really know if they like them to begin with. My advice is to use the answer in Question: 7-2.



Eye-Opening Topic 4 — Ordering

Questions Every Bride Should Know Before Ordering a Wedding Cake, as Well as Questions You'll Probably be Asked.

As professional bakers and marketers, we rate women's purchasing decisions based upon the "*emotional intensity*" of the sale.

For example, buying your wedding dress or choosing a wedding ring has a higher "*emotional intensity*" than buying a wedding cake.

On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest emotion, buying your wedding dress probably ranks as a 4 or 5, while buying your cake ranks as a 3.

In other words, buying a wedding cake isn't quite as important in the overall scheme of things as your dress.

Many women will buy wedding cakes with almost no "*emotional intensity*" at all or close to 1. Those brides are the ones who wouldn't consider reading this guidebook because the cake just isn't that big of a deal to them.

On the other hand, you do care. You will shop between 3-5 B/Ds to find a baker who offers you the best overall value. In fact, you probably care deeply about everything connected to your wedding and reception.

You care about what your family thinks and what your guests think. Good for you. I hope your thoughtfulness and passion stays with you the rest of your life.

Understanding what questions a B/D will ask, and what questions should be asked, is crucial to receiving a mouth-watering picture-perfect wedding cake while avoiding typical problems.

Question
4-1:

How far in advance should I order my wedding cake?

I found a Baker/Designer I really like. Is 3-6 months in advance enough time to book with them?

Here is a question that we rarely see answered correctly. The standard answer given in wedding planners, on wedding websites, or in bridal magazines is 3-6 months in advance.

If you follow those guidelines, you may be sorely disappointed.

Here's where size matters. If you are going to use a B/D working out of their home or from a very small one or two-person cake shop, you better contact them as soon as you book the church. Why? Because just like most churches and reception sites, they probably only handle one or two wedding cakes per weekend. We have interviewed many small B/Ds who are continuously booked 12 months in advance.

If you are going to use a grocery store, a country club, or a caterer, then 3-6 months makes sense.

If you are planning to use a midsize bakery, large bakery, or a cake boutique, 3-6 months might be long enough, but you shouldn't take the chance. Many cake shops and bakeries we interview only take a limited number of wedding cakes per weekend. *(On average, in-between 3-20.)*

They limit their wedding cakes per weekend to keep their quality standards high.

In addition, many bakeries would like to make more wedding cakes but do not have the necessary storage space, refrigeration, and employees to deliver the cakes.

With all that said, start searching for a B/D as soon as possible. You'll assure yourself of hiring the B/D of your choice instead of settling for seconds or worse thirds...eek!

Question
4-2:

How do I figure out how much cake to order? I don't want a lot left over nor do I want to run out.

I am inviting 125 guests, how much cake should I order?

Primarily it depends on two factors. First, is your reception an event comprised of music, hor'derves, cake, and beverages? Or, is there going to be a sit-down dinner or buffet included with the reception?

- *If you are only having cake and beverages, order a cake large enough to serve every guest.*
- *If you are having a full dinner, but your adult guest list is 100 or less, order cake for every guest.*
- *If children comprise more than 10% of the guest list, order a piece for every guest.*

- *If your reception will have more than 100 adult guests, you may think about scaling back the size of your cake. Why? Because a certain number of guests will be on a diet, will not like the cake flavors, have food allergies, do not like sweets, or simply won't make it to your reception.*

If you decide to scale back, the common rule-of-thumb is to subtract 25% of the total number from your RSVP list. As an example, if you have RSVPs for 200 guests, ordering a cake for 150 will put you right on track to serve every last delicious morsel.

With that said, we found brides who didn't want to take the chance of being embarrassed by running out. So, they ordered the full amount.

Here's two other items to keep in mind; The type (*flavor, filling*) of cake you serve will have an impact on how many people take a piece and the size of slices the server dishes out.

If you serve anything else except vanilla cake, you can expect more of your cake to be eaten. Why? Because it's something different than the same old birthday cake their neighbors, relatives or coworkers serve.

One last suggestion; if Aunt Betty doesn't really know how to serve a wedding cake, your 150 serving wedding cake could yield only 100 servings. If you are having a caterer or hotel staff member serve your cake, this shouldn't be a problem.

Question 4-3:	What questions can I expect the baker to ask me? What will a baker ask me on my first visit?
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We have prepared a separate questionnaire located in the appendix section for your review. It is titled, ***"Questions A Baker Might Ask They Don't Teach at Harvard."*** It is very thorough and designed to list the most common questions. Questions unique to a handful of bakers were not included.

Question 4-4:	Is there a minimum size for a wedding cake? I am only having a small gathering. Can I get a wedding cake for 8-12 guests?
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What is the definition of a wedding cake, anyway? According to the Encarta Dictionary, a wedding cake is a cake decorated with icing, usually white, and arranged in tiers, served at a wedding reception.

If you make a literal interpretation, it does mean a "tiered cake made with icing." The answer to the question is then up to the individual B/D you are working with.

If your B/D is willing to make a wedding cake made from a single layer 4" cake on the bottom and a cupcake on top, you will have successfully received a wedding cake for 2 people.

Typically though, B/Ds will begin quoting prices for wedding cakes beginning at 12-16 servings.

Question 4-5:	Where can I get ideas for my cake? Is there any other place besides the Internet to get ideas for my cake?
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Until 15 years ago, almost all the design ideas came from bridal magazines, bridal shows, B/D shops, and cake decorating books. Now all you need to do is log onto the Internet and bang...you can spend a whole week and still not find all the possible wedding cake sites to view photographs.

Our favorite method is for you to go to B/Ds in your community and see their displays. Just because you find cake images on Google, doesn't mean they can or want to duplicate it.

Furthermore, initially, B/Ds were proud to show off all their masterpieces on the Internet. But now, they feel brides are just ripping off their creativity and going to a lower priced B/D.

Consequently, B/Ds are pulling some of their wedding cakes off the web. They want brides to come in to see their work and visit with them. That way, a bride can receive the complete picture of their talent.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *As a side note, when I am consulting with a B/D, I advise them against showing "all" their wedding cakes on the web. Why?*

"Although a bride can see the photograph of a wedding cake on the web, they don't really see the whole picture."

Let me give you an example. Have you ever purchased moderate to high-priced shoes, purses, or blouses on the web? Probably not, because your fear is that it won't fit right, or the color is different than shown, or the material is not as comfortable as you thought.

In other words, your mind (fear) told you it was too risky. (Remember, I'm talking about good quality products, not what you buy at a big discount store with low prices.) Typically, a moderate to higher priced product requires a trained salesperson to explain features about the material, how it compares to others in its class, the designers influence, the way it is hand-made, and how it is superior.

*Guess what? It sounds a lot like how wedding cakes are made and explained by COMPETENT B/Ds. When B/Ds only show their wedding cakes on the net without giving you a complete explanation, **"you only see the photograph, not the whole picture."** It actually hurts instead of helps the B/D in the pursuit of convincing you to hire them.*

There is a psychological precept called the "CURIOSITY PRINCIPLE." It basically states that humans are very curious creatures. They will go to great lengths to have their curiosity satisfied. When a B/D posts their photos on the web, it takes away the curious nature of a prospective bride from going to the B/Ds store. Their brain tells them, "I guess that's all they have to offer."

*There is a good chance they are missing many brides from coming in and **"seeing the whole picture."***

Instead, I recommend for them to place enough of their photos on the web as a "sampling" to demonstrate their expertise. Then, make it clear to the bride they need to make an appointment or at least come in to see their complete collection of photographs and displays to experience the "whole picture—the whole story."

Question
4-6:

Should I ask to see some actual photos of cakes they have decorated?

Does it help me figure out how good a Baker/Designer is if I ask to see some real cakes they have decorated?

This is an absolute must.

You have to either view display cakes a B/D has created in their store or see wedding cakes they have designed in some sort of photo album. It doesn't matter whether they show you pictures on a computer screen or in a traditional photo album.

We have found a direct correlation between how B/Ds show their wedding cake displays and photos in comparison to how serious they are as a wedding cake provider.

A **“great”** B/D will have at least 200 actual photos of their own cakes coupled with 20+ in-store displays. The displays are up-to-date and reflect the latest designs and colors. Their website will look professional, fresh, informative, and will contain 100+ plus unique designs categorized into “*style groups*.”

In addition, their in-store photo albums may contain 100+ pictures of wedding cakes decorated by other B/Ds taken from magazines, websites, or cake decorating books demonstrating their skill level.

It should be apparent to you these people are *serious* about wedding cakes

A **“good”** B/D will have between 12-20 actual displays and 100+ distinctive in-store photos to show you. They will not have as many displays for you to see, nor are the displays as current or creative as a “great” B/D. Their website may or may not look professional. But they will have 50-100 distinctive photos. Do not expect their wedding cakes to be in “*style groups*.”

This B/D views wedding cakes as *important* to their business, but they are content being just “*good enough*.”

A **“middle-of-the-road”** B/D will have 4-12 displays and 25-75 distinctive photos of cakes. Some of the displays are probably aged and lack creativity. They will have photos and pictures, but some of them look like they are from 2005. Their website typically looks amateurish and has 50 photos. If you look closely, you'll notice many of the wedding cakes have the same design either decorated in different colors or with different flower arrangements.

This B/D wants to sell you a wedding cake as long as they don't have to put forth too much effort or go out of their way to do something extra.

An **“Indifferent”** B/D has less than four displays, which typically illustrates very easy designs. The displays usually look aged and faded. They do have one or two albums of 5 x 7 wedding cakes, or on their website, but the photos are usually simplistic designs to hide their limitations of skill.

Many of them do not even have a table for you to sit down and visit.

You'll also notice, some of the photos will be wedding cakes they decorated years and years ago. They may still have photos in their album from the first wedding cakes they ever decorated.

This B/D wants to make some extra money decorating wedding cakes, but only on their terms...RUN!



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *When a B/D uses smaller photos than 8 x 11s, or small images on their website, it helps cover their lack of skill.*

Go ahead and do the test yourself. B/Ds who use full sized images or photos want you to see the details of their cakes, because they are confident of their skills.

Question
4-7:

I'm 29 and hear people talk about traditional wedding cakes. What are they?
My mom said she had a "traditional wedding cake" but now, there are more choices for today's bride. What does she mean by that?

"Traditional" wedding cakes refer to the main style of decorating from about 1950-1990. After 1990 cake decorating grew in popularity and the landscape of styles and designs began to change. Around 2000, the Internet and cable TV began having the largest impact in history on the cake decorating industry.

Since then, B/Ds have begun categorizing wedding cakes into **"style groups."** If you log onto the net, you'll find B/Ds with categories such as Whimsical, Floral, Romantic, Themed, Creative, and so forth.

Pull out an old Wilton cake decorating magazine from 1975 or 1989 and you will see the "traditional" style of wedding cake. The traditional wedding cake was white cake (*vanilla*), white frosting (*vanilla*), pillars between the tiers and most of the time had some sort of swag design on the side. Frosting flowers reigned supreme with contenders such as fresh flowers a distant second. Toppers were usually a bridal couple or some sort of bell, heart, or dove decoration.

You can still find traditional wedding cakes on many websites. They are being offered by B/Ds who offer traditional or what is referred to as classic designs in their repertoire.

Question
4-8:

What options are available other than traditional wedding cakes?
I want something totally different than your standard tiered wedding cake. What can I get?

Traditional wedding cake has evolved over the last 20 years from white wedding cakes with a classic decorating style into other dessert ideas. In our interviews and research, we found a few interesting ideas. (*These same answers are also listed in "Topic 2: question 9."*) They are:

- 1) Buying a smaller wedding cake and having the aunt or grandma make additional sheet cakes.
- 2) Buying mini-donuts and piling them up to form a white looking wedding cake.
- 3) Going to McDonalds and buying hundreds of their dollar apple pies as a dessert to be used in place of a traditional wedding cake. The cost, \$1 per serving.
- 4) Buying Twinkies at the day-old store. After they are unwrapped, sprinkle powdered sugar on top of them and then placing them on trays. The cost is about 65¢ per piece.
- 5) Serving plain frosted cupcakes, notice I said plain, not decorated, and placed on a cupcake stand that can be rented at a rental store. The cost about 1.00¢-\$2.75 per serving.
- 6) Serving cookies with their initials on them. The cost, as low as \$1.00-\$1.50 per serving.

- 7) Placing a plain 8" cake on each table or grouping of 10 people. The cost, as low as \$1.75 per serving
- 8) Using cheesecakes, either decorated or plain. Not a less pricey alternative, but different.
- 9) A dessert bar with choices of bars, brownies, cheesecakes, tarts, and other pastries.

Question

4-9:

What are the advantages or disadvantages of ordering a wedding cake versus some sheet cakes?

I am trying to save money, plus make serving the cake as simple as possible; does serving sheet cakes make sense?

This question comes down to whether your reception is “*formal*” versus “*informal*” and how much you are allotting for your entire wedding budget. If you are spending \$20,000-\$50,000 on your overall wedding, serving sheet cakes won’t fit the ambience you have created. Sheet cakes will appear second-best and out of place. On the other hand, if you are on a tight budget serving fried chicken, potato salad, and punch; sheet cakes work fine.

Here’s the basic common practice: If you are budgeting under \$10,000 for your entire wedding including the reception, sheet cakes work great. If you are budgeting over \$10,000, you should seriously consider having a tiered wedding cake.

Buying two full sheets of vanilla cake pre-cut into 96 (*192 servings*) will cost you around \$150-\$200. A tiered wedding cake will cost you an average of \$700-\$1200.

If you are seriously considering replacing a tiered wedding cake with sheet cakes, keep in mind, the recent concept of buying a smaller tiered cake, plus serving sheet cakes. Then, at least you’ll have a more pleasing photograph for your wedding album.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *If you decide on a smaller tiered center cake and use sheet cakes to serve most of your guests, just be sure you have a cake table large enough to accommodate all the cakes. It is easy to overlook how much space is required for a few full sheet cakes, napkins, plates, and other items on the cake table.*

Question

4-10:

Will most Baker/Designers let you change your order without paying an additional charge?

I am worried my Baker/Designer will not let me change my mind after I place the original order. If they do, until what point do they usually let you change it?

If this is a concern, ask this question in your interview process during your pre-appointment planning. If your B/D does have additional charges for certain conditions, it should be spelled out in the wedding cake agreement.

Here’s what we found from asking our group of 350 wedding cake bakers. **Most B/Ds will allow you to change your complete order from top to bottom without any sort of penalty until one month prior to your reception.**

As soon as you fall underneath one month or 30 days, expect to incur some sort of additional fee or small charge(s). Here are some typical reasons for adding an extra charge:

- *If you completely change your order less than one-two weeks before your reception.*
- *If you change your order when special hand-made flowers or other hand-made items were already made.*
- *Canceling any sort of preordered cake topper, such as monogram initials, or a specialty bride and groom.*
- *Changing an “original” design. This is a design where a B/D has spent considerable creative time designing and drawing a finished sketch you approved.*

My advice is to ask every B/D right up front. **Know beforehand what additional charges or penalties you’ll be paying for, and until what exact date you can make changes.**

Question
4-11:

In most cases, will I lose my deposit if I cancel my wedding cake?

Most Baker/Designers I have spoken with want me to put down a 50% deposit, which is around \$400. If I cancel my order, will I lose the entire amount?

Yes, you will! As soon as a B/D takes your deposit (*many bakers are now calling it a nonrefundable retainer fee*) they have committed to making your wedding cake in return for your commitment to receive a cake on a particular date. Your deposit (retainer fee) represents an earnest payment toward an outstanding balance.

Your B/D will now turn away other orders if they are completely booked for that particular date. After accepting your order, it can be difficult to replace your order if you cancel. In addition, they already have a time commitment and possibly a materials commitment in arranging your order.

For these reasons, **most B/Ds will not refund your deposit (retainer fee) or “initial payment.”**

According to our last 350 surveyed B/Ds (*Sept 2021*), 331 said if you cancel your cake under any conditions, you will not receive any of your deposit back. The 19 exceptions were from B/Ds in smaller communities.

We found some B/Ds who had “minimum retainers” as low as \$25. Most B/Ds had “minimum retainers” between \$50-\$100, or 50% of the total order.

To put this into context, if you placed an order for a wedding cake with B/D #1 and their minimum retainer was \$50, you would need to pay at least \$50 toward your wedding cake. It doesn’t matter if the cake is for 50 servings valued at \$150 or a 300 serving cake valued at \$2,000, you will need to pay a \$50 non-refundable minimum retainer.

Also, there are B/Ds who make you pay a retainer based upon the total price of the order. These B/Ds typically charge you a percentage between 10%-50% of the total amount due.

To put this into context, if you placed an order for a wedding cake with B/D #2 and their minimum retainer is 50% of the order and your order amounts to \$1,000, you will need to put down \$500. The \$500 represents your nonrefundable retainer. If you cancel for any reason, be prepared to forfeit the entire \$500.

If paying a large up-front non-refundable retainer is a concern, put this question on your list to ask in your pre-appointment planning.

Question 4-12:	Can you give me any advice to ensure my cake is going to look like what I ordered before my family and guests see it at my reception? It bothers me that I can't see the wedding cake until my reception. What more can I do than hope it comes out OK?
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Actually, you can see your wedding cake prior to your reception. That is according to 90% of the B/Ds we surveyed (*July 2021*). They all agreed that typically your wedding cake is finished by the day before or early the same morning of your reception.

Here's their advice. If you are queasy, swing by and check it out. Knowing your time is precious on the morning of your wedding, here's another idea; send someone else to check-out your cake. Have them take a photo on their cell phone and text it to you.

Or, simply ask your B/D to text you a photo of your cake by 9:00am the day of your reception.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *"There is one little caveat. Your cake may be in pieces and actually be assembled or finished at the reception site. If you think seeing your cake in bits and parts may cause a panic attack, you should probably skip this suggestion."*



Eye-Opening Topic 5 — Design

Thirty-Nine Revealing Questions to Make Sure You Get a Gorgeous Wedding Cake Instead of One That Could Look Like a Second Grade Art Project.

The design of your wedding cake has a memorable and lasting impact on your guests. It is seen as the “focal point” of the reception.

While that is true...not-so-fast. Our research provides a surprising side-notation!

From surveying and interviewing approximately 350,000 brides (Sept. 2006-Sept. 2021) on which is more important, the wedding cake “design” or “taste,” taste wins at a ratio of 54% to 46%. This means **the majority of brides believe the taste of the cake is more important than the visual effect.**

That is an eye-opening discovery because most B/Ds think the opposite is true.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *I am not one to argue with 350,000 brides, but if your wedding cake looks (horrible) like a second grader decorated it, that’s what your guests will remember.*

Here’s why. Much research has been devoted to our five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. The majority of people rank sight as the most important sensory with taste typically ranking third or fourth. If your cake is less than beautiful, the majority of your guests will remember it over the taste because the lasting visual imagery will supersede its taste.

*Please allow me to describe it in a visual way. We'll use "horrible" vs. "beautiful." When your guests see your wedding cake for the first time, **they make a judgment whether they like it or not, which is synonymous with the "first impression" of meeting a person.***

If your guests think, "Wow that cake looks horrible" they subconsciously also believe the cake probably doesn't taste very good either. On the other hand, if a guest sees a cake as being "beautiful," they believe it will taste as great as it looks. It's funny how that works.

Question
5-1:

Are there any standard rules about choosing a wedding cake?

I don't know the first thing about choosing a wedding cake design. Where do I begin?

There are no "standard" rules about choosing a design. Every B/D has developed their specific procedures for helping you choose a concept. Within their procedures for placing an order, they have developed questions which help you choose a wedding cake.

The sheer fact **there are no "industry standard guidelines"** can make it confusing to choose a B/D and design.

Throw away any so-called rulebook. If you follow the guidelines provided by the brides and B/Ds who supplied the questions and answers within, you'll have all the power shopping information you'll need for choosing the perfect wedding cake that fits your style, taste, and price range.



PRICELESS ADVICE: Here's how strong one of our "Gold Standard Wedding Cake" partners feels about standards. They have written a sign that hangs on the wall of their cake decorating area that says, ***"To create an extraordinary wedding cake, we will use 'unparalleled standards' to take an order, bake, decorate, and deliver their lifetime memory...or else we've conceded to an 'ordinary' wedding cake."***

Question
5-2:

How do you decide on a design?

There are so many different wedding cake designs on the Internet and bridal magazines, how do I decide what to choose?

The largest factor involved in your decision-making process is based upon what we discovered and call your **"Wedding Cake Personality Profile."** To a large extent, everything you choose for your wedding is based upon one of four different "personality" categories. Without getting off on a tangent, let's keep this discussion focused on wedding cakes. Your personality for choosing a wedding cake design will probably fall into one of the following categories.

- First, SIMPLE: Your approach to buying merchandise or services is typically simple. The decoration of your cake is not a highly "emotional issue" for you. If you spend any time at all on the Net, you will probably spend 1-3 hours looking for design ideas. However, it's more likely you'll simply go to an established B/D and choose a cake design from an album, display, their website, or Facebook page. You may make a few simple modifications, but most likely you will pick the cake "as is."

If you are younger, you are more influenced by your mother and trends. If you are older or getting married for a second time, the design is not as important as it was the first time. You will probably have more fun with your wedding and/or groom's cake.

- Second, **SELECTIVE**: You are inclined to be more **selective** in the choice of your final design. You will probably spend 3-5 hours going over wedding cake designs on 10-20 web sites and look through 1-3 bridal magazines. You will follow the traditional method of visiting three different B/Ds. You will probably create a wedding cake by picking elements from several wedding cakes to craft one that suits you. You are more likely to be a woman in your mid-twenties to late thirties. You watch trends, but you are not persuaded by outside influences as much as when you were younger.
- Third, **COMPLEX**: You are spending 5-8 hours on the Net and buying every bridal magazine for the hottest ideas. You will probably call and visit 3-5 B/Ds to see what they have to offer. You are more likely to choose a wedding cake that is themed or **complex** in design. You are willing to pay more for a wedding cake to get something guests haven't seen at another reception. Most likely, you are a professional woman who makes her own decisions and seeks the help of other professionals for advice. In all likelihood, you will utilize the services of a specialty cake boutique because you understand the value of using a highly skilled craftsman.
- Fourth, **UNIQUE**: You want to create something **unique**. Just like your dress, it embarrasses you at the thought of someone else having a cake you can get anywhere. You probably have been to several B/Ds, but none of their designs really hit you. You have spent 8-20 hours searching the Net for a fabulous cake, but can't seem to find the perfect one. You are the most likely to create an original themed cake for your beach, sky diving, or western wedding. If you fit this profile, you are the most judicious and have the highest "emotional intensity" in choosing a design. You want the cake to be perfect along with everything else in the wedding. Settling for second best is not an option. Price is not a concern, only complete satisfaction. You could be any age category.

Eighty percent of brides belong in category two or between categories two and three.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *Personality profiling is a sales tool. There is nothing unethical or immoral about using it to gain a grip on a prospective bride. It actually allows the B/D to serve you better if he or she can quickly understand your individual profile. The "Wedding Cake Personality Profile" is closely related to the four different types of B/Ds. As an example, the fourth type of personality is most likely to purchase a cake from a B/D categorized as a "Cake Boutique."*

The personality profile was one of our discoveries while conducting research for the 2008 first edition of "Wedding Cake Secrets Exposed." Over the years, it has been shown to be quite accurate.

If you can diagnose your own cake personality, you'll understand what type of design and what type of B/D you'll most likely choose.

When it comes to choosing a design, you have more options than ever. Brides are choosing designs based upon:

- *The pattern in their wedding dress.*
- *The architecture of the reception site, such as an old church, rustic wood and stone country inn, hotel, barn, backyard, forest, or beach.*
- *Themes such as Hawaiian, Gothic, Castles, Mickey and Mini Mouse, Cruise ship, Hot Air Balloon, NASCAR racing, Rodeo, Skiing, Boating, and the medieval period.*
- *Contemporary patterns found in cloth on furniture such as chairs, rugs, and glassware.*
- *The use of their flowers.*
- *Traditional design.*
- *Cultural designs, such as Asian, Spanish, or African.*

Beauty in a wedding cake design is in the eye of the beholder. **Like a piece of art, there is no right or wrong cake design.** Choose a design you think is beautiful.

Don't worry about what anyone else thinks, including your mother. (*Sorry mom.*) In twenty years, it's you and your children who will be looking at your wedding photos and remembering the great times at your reception. Make sure your wedding cake is a part of those memories.

Question
5-3:

What are my options when it comes to designing my cake?

I am not sure what I want. Can you explain the choices for decorating that are available to me?

You should ask every B/D this question. We would even suggest you ask this as one of your first three questions. It forces the B/D to tell you and show you everything they are willing to do. It will help you cut through the chase for the types of designs they are capable of doing.

If a B/D only uses whip and butter cream frostings, there isn't a need to waste an hour of your time to find out he or she doesn't do any wedding cakes made from rolled fondant.

If you want a six-foot cake that looks like it could serve 2000, but really only serves 125, (*because most of it would be made from Styrofoam*) you'll want to know right up front if they have the skill or time to create it.

If a B/D throws down a bunch of books and says, "here's our selection of wedding cakes, let me know when you find something," tells you it's highly unlikely they will reproduce a photo from a wedding magazine or the Internet.

Just keep in mind, you can be the most help to yourself and a B/D if you have performed some pre-appointment planning for a direction you want to go with your design. Although www.weddingcake.org needs to be desperately updated, it still maintains great information for pre-appointment planning.

Question
5-4:

What is the most common or popular wedding cakes designs for 2022-2023?

I want to have a cake that is modern. Is there one design style that a lot of brides are choosing?

Surprise! Once again, there isn't a single catch-all answer. This time there are three answers.

First, there are most popular designs on a *national scale*. Second, there are most popular designs on a *geographic, or local scale*. Third, there are most popular designs from a *particular B/D*.

Here's what we can tell you. **On a “national scale,” see the answer for “Question 3:1.”**

On a “geographic, or local scale,” some sort of ocean theme is still very popular for coastal states as Florida and California. The southern, northeast, and northwest parts of the country are utilizing tons of fresh flowers, and creating cakes that closely resemble the national scene. The Midwest states tend to have the most conservative brides and it shows in their choice of more traditional designs or minimalistic decorations.

On an individual basis, you'll have to ask every “particular B/D” for their answer. What may stun you is out of 350 different B/Ds who responded to this question, *93 had a different “most popular wedding design,”* that did not follow the national trend. In fact, only 30 wedding cake artists agreed on a particular design they felt was overall the most popular.

Typically, the most popular wedding cake designs for any B/D are their original creations. B/Ds create original designs unique to their bakery, so a bride won't be able to go down the street and see the same design and get it from “Copy-Cat Cathy's Cake Shop.”

The research from this answer reveals there are many more “*popular*” and “*common*” wedding cake styles out there than what the Internet and bridal magazines are showing and would like you to believe.

Question
5-5:

How do I decide on the perfect wedding cake?

I want my wedding cake to be perfect. What advice can you give me?

The question is not, “how do I decide on a wedding cake?” It refers to the “*perfect*” wedding cake!

It tells us the brides who asked this question are not looking for any shortcuts.

Many brides voice their appreciation for a well decorated wedding cake by saying, “*It looks like a work of art. I would hate to cut or even eat it.*”

I call it the “**THE GASP FACTOR.**” Allow me to explain.

When you see the perfect wedding cake, it will hit you right between the eyes, while at the same time your jaw is hitting the floor. Immediately your mind will say, “*OMG*” this is the one. Knowing you have seen the right cake is like finding the perfect wedding dress. You will be drawn to it like a 10-carat sparkling flawless diamond and wondering where you can make cuts in other areas of your reception to afford it.

That's how you will know!

The point might have been overly dramatized, but just “buying a wedding cake” and choosing the “perfect wedding cake” are two completely different mindsets. If you are serious about finding the perfect wedding cake, you probably have a “complex” or “unique” personality type as explained in question 5-2.

One last bit of advice. Before you begin shopping for the perfect wedding cake, it would be a good idea to check the limit on your credit card. It is very hard to use the words “perfect” and “low-priced” in the same sentence.

Question

5-6:

Do most Baker/Designers make you choose a wedding cake from their own wedding cake albums or are they willing to do what I want?

Can I get to have my cake decorated the way I want, or do I have to choose from one of your designs?

Approximately 15% of the B/Ds we surveyed only allow you to choose wedding cakes from their selection of designs or create an original. They refuse to recreate a cake from another B/D.

Although this seems like they lack the required skill to replicate a cake from a photo or they feel as though it is unethical to infringe on someone else’s design, it is really a fundamental business decision.

A B/D will usually do this for two reasons. First, since they created the original design, they feel comfortable and confident reproducing the same design for you. For them it is a mechanism of quality control. Second, they know exactly how long it will take them to make the wedding cake. It helps them set a fair price, while keeping their profit margin inline.

When you choose a design or have a B/D create a design they have never tried before, a B/D will be apprehensive about how the cake will turnout. In addition, it becomes a guessing game for the amount of time it will take to create it from start to finish. Consequently, the uncertainty of required skill and time will...**cost you a higher price.**

Now, for the other 85% of B/Ds who are willing to do what you want. Generally, **B/Ds are willing to try just about anything because of artistic ego.** Just keep in mind, watch out for the “expert” versus the “imposter.” Please re-read the attributes of a great B/D in “Eye-Opening Topic 1.”

Question

5-7:

Can you work with us to make a unique cake that fits our personalities?

Can you create a unique cake for us based upon an interview about our personalities?

Here’s a BIG WARNING! If you are very particular and want everything perfect, **do not** ask a B/D for something original or unique.

Our research demonstrates **a whopping 18%** (survey of 9,342 brides April 2021 - September 2021) **of the brides polled were unhappy** with their original or unique design. That is an astonishingly high number. That compares to only 2.5%-7% of brides who were not happy with a cake they chose from a display or photo.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *A good analogy is to compare building a house from blueprints and buying a house that is ready to move into.*

One is a concept and the other you can see, feel, and touch. You know exactly what you are getting. Research has demonstrated you are 5 to 1 more likely to like a prefinished home versus building one from the ground up. Take this advice to

heart before you endeavor upon having a B/D sketch something new and different for your masterpiece.

This question dovetails with the next question number 5-8.

Question
5-8:

Can you create something original, just for us?

I do not want to pick a design from one of your albums or displays. Are you creative enough to make something original?

Keep in mind, B/Ds vary in talent just like musicians, attorneys, and doctors. We doubt you would ask a family practice doctor to do brain surgery on your fiancé. (*Okay, most of the time you wouldn't.*) Some B/Ds have more experience, talent, and skill than others. You will need to look around and interview several B/Ds before you find one that has the skill sets to create your dream cake.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *Since originality is a consistent theme of possible disappointment with the brides we interviewed, I coined it the "Picasso Syndrome."*

Normally, when you request an original wedding cake, it begins with a discussion about the pattern of your wedding dress, the setting of the reception, a central theme for the wedding, a whimsical idea or a host of other possibilities.

In turn, the B/D takes your ideas and creates some rough sketches for your approval. Although the sketches give you a pretty good idea of how your cake is going to look, you're still kind of nervous if it will translate into a perfect wedding cake.

Then you see it at the reception, and BAM you feel like you just had your favorite TV show cancelled; shocked and terribly disappointed.

It doesn't look like anything you had envisioned.

*Of the surveyed brides who had original wedding cakes, **an astonishing 18%** were not satisfied with the finished look of their original design.*

Why the high disappointment rate? Really good B/Ds view themselves as artists who are using frosting and cake as their medium instead of oil and canvas. Every cake they create is viewed as an original piece of art. To them, your wedding cake is no different than a work produced by Van Gough, Monet, or Picasso.

Everyone, including you, has a perspective of beauty. Take Picasso for example; some people believe his masterpieces are genius, while others believe his work is that of a 5 year old child.

Some B/Ds incur the same problem. When they create an original wedding cake for you, they believe it looks like a "Picasso Masterpiece." Unfortunately, you see a cake which has been decorated by a 5 year old child.

You need to ask yourself, do I believe my B/D, is in the 78% who can create a masterpiece that fits my personal taste based on his or her previous work?

For example, I read an article in a prominent brides magazine written by a very well known baker who said, “Give your baker some ideas about what you want and then step back and trust her/him to make a gorgeous wedding cake for you. Let them do their thing.”

Our research has discovered, that might not be the smartest advice!

If you are not completely convinced, lower your anxiety level by choosing a pre-designed image or display. You can always make it original by making a few modifications of your own. This way, you will know what to expect and you’ll avoid the “Picasso Syndrome.”

Question
5-9:

What makes your cakes original?

It seems to me, many Baker/Designers do the same kinds of decorating. What do you do that is different, unique, and original?

Just like any artist, whether they are a painter, sculpture, or songwriter, they possess a certain style brought about from their different life’s experiences, likings, and training. An artist may create wonderful watercolor canvases, but may not have the same ability in charcoal or acrylics. A songwriter may write country hits, but can’t write a lick of rock.

Likewise, talented B/Ds love to work in one medium more than others and that expertise carries over into the “originality” of their cakes. If you ask, “What makes your cakes original?” you’ll get answers like:

- *“90% of my wedding cakes are made with rolled fondant.*
- *“We have a lot of experience with designs from wedding dresses.”*
- *“I learned how to create beautiful effects on wedding cakes using “blown sugar,” so many of our cakes use “blown sugar” creations not found in any other bakery.”*
- *“A majority of our cakes are decorated using butter cream frosting, and all the designs are original.*
- *“We don’t copy designs from books, magazines, or the Internet.”*



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Be careful about “original” cake designs. Just because they are original doesn’t mean you’ll love them. You’ll need to apply this cautious guideline; go see their displays and photographs to make a judgment of their abilities.*

Question
5-10:

Do you specialize in any particular cake styles?

Is your bakery known for any certain style(s) of decorating?

This question is not as odd as it may seem. These brides want to know if some B/Ds specialize in certain design or decorating styles. The answer is many of them do, but not all of them.

In our surveys, most (81%) B/Ds reported that they did not specialize in any unusual types of wedding cakes.

For example, a particular B/D may have mastered the use of “pulled sugar” (*you’ll have to Google pulled sugar wedding cakes*) wedding cakes and promotes the fact they do. Another B/D could be very

talented at creating 8-foot-tall wedding cakes (*go to Google select images and search for the term “tall wedding cakes”*). They could be experts at using certain types of frostings such as “**white chocolate clay**” or “**rolled buttercream**,” making “**marzipan figurines**,” or a host of other specialty items for wedding cakes you have never heard of before.

All of those design items are learned skills. Not every B/D is interested in making the investment in time and money to create those types of wedding cakes.

If you have a particular design or style of cake in mind, you’ll be better served if you just come out and ask the B/D what you are looking for. If you’re looking for “rolled fondant” cake styles, just ask them, “*Do you have a selection of rolled fondant cakes that I could see?*” If you want an original creation, ask to see their one-of-a-kind originals.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *I can attest to the fact most B/Ds do not specialize in any “single” style of wedding cake. In my consulting and coaching, I help B/Ds who want to separate themselves from their competitors, by creating what I call a “**distinctive offer**” or “**DO**.” In other words, what distinctive wedding cakes are they willing to “DO” their counterparts can’t or won’t.*

If you are looking for a “DO” B/D, be prepared to make a few phone calls. As I stated 8 out of 10 B/Ds are in business to market their wedding cakes to as many brides as possible, not to 2 out of 10 buyers.

Question
5-11:

What can I do to better express the vision of my cake? I am afraid it will be something less than I expected.

How can I explain what I have pictured in my mind to make sure you understand me?

As you are looking for images of cakes, print them out and make copies of them. Then highlight, circle, or somehow note what you like about each of the elements.

Grab a piece of paper and hand-sketch the elements from the different cakes you have saved or cut them out and glue them to a sheet of paper in the order you want each tier decorated.

Grab some crayons or colored pencils and draw in the colors where you would like them placed.

By this time, you will have a pretty good “sketch drawing” to bring to a B/D. Don’t worry if it looks like a fifth grader drew it. The B/D will appreciate the extent you have gone to help her or him understand the concepts in your mind.

Relax, a great B/D will take your drawings and work with you to create a final version. Together, you can work out the finishing details.

Question
5-12:

Can I bring in a picture I’ve seen in a magazine or on another website for a price quotation?

If I bring you a picture from a magazine, can you tell me if you can make it and how much it would cost?

This depends on the B/D. We found some B/Ds to be so rigid, they decline customer requests. However, with that being said, their “logic” does make sense. They believe customers choose them for their artistic and creative ability. That’s why brides come to them in the first place. They believe that if you bring a copy of another B/Ds work to have them recreate it, you don’t r-e-a-l-l-y need them.

Their advice is for you to take it to a B/D that has the talent and skill to recreate the cake, but not necessarily the vision to create an original design.

In essence, these select B/Ds only decorate designs they have created. **As one B/D told us, “Do you think “Monet” would have accepted money from a client to recreate the painting of another artist?”** Yes, that is how serious some B/Ds take themselves and their cakes.

Putting aside those select B/Ds, which in our sampling represented only about 3%, 97% of the B/Ds said yes. When we began our research on this question in 2004, we found only about 50% of B/Ds willing to even duplicate another B/Ds work.

NOTICE: As stated in the answer 2-11, there is a new app that should be online in early 2023 called “Wedding Cake Wizard” that overcomes the issues this question brings up.

It allows you to upload 4 of your favorite wedding cake photos to receive prices from competing bakers. You’ll be able to understand which cake designs are within your budget, know who has the skills to do your submitted cake designs and then make appointments with those professional bakers who meet the criteria you’re looking for.

As competition has increased and the Internet has made it easier for brides to compare one B/D against another, market forces has changed the landscape of doing business. Now, most B/Ds want to bid on another B/Ds creation to get the order. As of our latest survey, August 2021, 92% of brides are bringing in their own design ideas or photos from the Internet to be recreated.

55% of brides stated they were not completely satisfied with the designs offered by the B/Ds they visited and saw cakes on the Internet they liked better.

Question 5-13:	I see a lot of expensive wedding cakes on the Internet. Where do I find regular and affordable wedding cakes? All the cakes on the net are \$5-\$20 a slice, where do I find cakes that are closer to what I can afford at about \$3-\$5 a slice?
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You are correct. ***On average, many cakes seen on the Internet seem to be priced higher than what your average B/D charges.***

Nationally, we found the average bride pays about \$450-\$900 for a 150 serving wedding cake. But, the average price on the Internet and what you see in bridal magazines average about \$4.00-\$8.00 per slice or \$600-\$1200.

Here’s an explanation of why prices are higher on the Internet. If you owned a cake boutique and displayed wedding cakes on your website, would you put up images of just your average wedding cakes or wedding cakes that look like every other baker? Of course, you wouldn’t.

The cake shop owner knows the entire world is looking at their wedding cakes. They have to put the most appealing, unusual, and pricey cakes on the Internet to grab the attention of a prospective bride. It is natural for a B/D to show off their best work.

Their website is similar to a huge billboard saying, “look at me...look at me! Come to my store!”

By the way, most of those same cake shop owners have wedding cakes that cost less than what they show on their website. Additionally, here’s what we found after performing research on close to 1200 bakeries listed on the “knot” and “WeddingWire” in 75 US cities.

Generally, **B/Ds who had up-to-date and professionally designed websites were priced higher.** Before you start looking for B/Ds without a website, there is a logical explanation.

Everything a B/D does to enhance their business, which includes spending time and money on marketing (*including the Internet*), goes into overhead expenses. That in turn, increases the final prices of their wedding cakes.

Here is an easy way to understand this. The actual cost to produce one of your favorite colas is less than 19 cents per bottle. The bottle costs more than the cola inside. Yet, you still pay \$1.79 at the convenience store. The main cost components are the packaging, transportation, marketing, and advertising of the product. If the cola company didn’t promote their cola, you could buy it for around 60¢ a bottle.

Likewise, if a B/D doesn’t spend the time and money promoting themselves in bridal magazines, at bridal shows, and on the Internet, they should be able to sell for less.

Here’s the deal though; **B/Ds who promote themselves on the Internet, in bridal magazines and at bridal shows tend to be more reputable and trustworthy.**

Question
5-14:

Is it possible to take ideas from different cakes I’ve seen on the Internet and create my own personalized wedding cake?

I must be hard to please because I don’t really see any cakes I like. However, if I use bits and pieces from 3 or 4 different wedding cakes, I can see a cake coming together that could work for me. Will a Baker/Designer do that?

Any competent B/D can do this for you. If you choose exactly what decoration you want from each photo and then proceed to sketch a design containing those elements before you go to your favorite B/D, you’ll know exactly what you’ll get.

However, we would still suggest you ask your B/D if the design you created has any visual design flaws. In normal English, that means will the decoration look good, or could it look better with the B/D’s professional input?

Question
5-15:

I found a photo on the Internet I really like; how do I find someone that can duplicate it?

How hard is it to find a Baker/Designer that can make a wedding cake I found on the Internet?

Finding a B/D to duplicate a photo is easy. Finding a B/D that can do a good job replicating it is not as easy.

Why? Like any artist, they tend to be better in one medium than another. Just because an artist does a wonderful job with acrylics does not mean they are as skillful with bronze sculpturing. Some B/Ds are better with fondant, while some are better with gum paste flowers or unusual shapes.

The percentage of dissatisfied brides goes up with the “Difficulty Factor” of the wedding cake. As an example, if the design is relatively easy, the percentage of brides being content with their wedding cake is high. As the design complexity increases, so does the percentage of dissatisfaction.

Oh, sure there are exceptions. Besides, 90% of B/Ds still do a good enough job to keep brides happy. Just keep in mind, **your odds of not liking your cake are around 1 in 10 when you go to a B/D who didn’t create the original design.**



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *When you are taking images off the Internet and shopping B/Ds, this is another time you should hire the best one you can afford. Otherwise, you’re taking an unnecessary risk of becoming an unhappy statistic.*

As a reminder, take a look at Question 2-11 to review a new service to help you find a professional baker who can do a superb job of duplicating a wedding cake photo found on-line. It’s an app called “Wedding Cake Wizard” and will be available in 2023.

Question
5-16:

How do I get the cake to match my theme?

I want a Disney Castle wedding cake. How do you create something to go along with that particular theme?

Themes such as Hawaiian, country, or popular characters from Disneyland tend to be more fun than traditional wedding cakes. With that in mind, **find a B/D you consider “creative.”** Themed wedding cakes are more about creativity than about having decorating skills to make more complex designs.

When you find a creative B/D, we’re sure they will be eager to help you design something that will go well with your ideas. Be prepared to spend a little extra time going over design ideas and possibly a little extra money on the time spent developing an idea for you.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *If you want a themed cake, again, we would advise choosing an experienced B/D. Although someone with less expertise could create an acceptable looking cake, don’t take the chance.*

Although, we don’t have the statistics for this category, the B/Ds we surveyed stated themed cakes had more complaints than traditional wedding cakes. The brides we surveyed

agreed. In my opinion, themed cakes take a more creative person versus having advanced skill sets in design.

Question
5-17:

What advice can you give me about the use of colors?

I am using black and pastel pink colors in my wedding. How do suggest I incorporate them on the cakes?

Colors that lean toward pastel tones reflect a traditional approach, while bright vivid colors are more contemporary. Just this simple understanding of color design could influence your decision from one design to another.

Also, keep in mind the time of year. Late fall, winter, and early spring usually lends itself to darker colors, while late spring, summer, and early fall to pastel and brighter colors.

Anyway, it is a good bet that by the time you read this book, you already have your wedding colors chosen.

Now, how do you use this information? Let's review three examples.

In the first one, let's say your wedding colors are Croissant (light brown) and Snorkel Blue. You could frost the entire wedding cake in the Croissant color and do a simple 3-dot decoration with the Snorkel Blue.

In the second example, let's say your colors are Spring Crocus (yellow), Rococco Red, and Daiquiri green. You could frost the wedding cake in Daiquiri Green or just white, and then have gum paste flowers or fresh flowers using Spring Crocus and Rococco Red.

In the final example, let's say your wedding colors are Shitake (darker brown) and Caribbean Sea bluish green). You might consider frosting the cake in white. Then, using the Shitake color to do some type of very thin scrollwork and finishing it by adding Caribbean Sea buttercream flowers, gum paste flowers or dyeing some fresh flowers to place on edges of each tier.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Take your color scheme along with you while shopping for a B/D. Ask the B/Ds you are interviewing where they would recommend using your wedding colors. You could be surprised at their answers.*

Question
5-18:

Can I frost my entire cake in any color? Will it cost more?

I want to use Ivory colored frosting to cover my cake. Can you do it and will it cost extra?

We did not find a single B/D who wouldn't frost a wedding cake in ivory. On the other hand, not all wedding cakes are frosted in white or ivory. When you start searching the web, you'll see cakes frosted in pale shades of pink, lavender, blue, salmon, green, etc.

A tinted frosting makes your decorations “pop” and makes guests take notice of your cake.

Dark colors such as red and purple jewel tones can be used, but be aware, the high concentration of food coloring to make these colors could make the frosting taste bitter, if you are using buttercream. We say could because it depends on the brand of color(s) the B/D is using. Simply ask your B/D which, if any, colors they use are slightly bitter.

On the other hand, if you tint rolled fondant in purple, it will not be bitter because rolled fondant has a higher concentration of sugar and typically uses powdered color. In either case, ask your B/D.

One of the options you may receive is to airbrush the entire cake with the dark color of your choice. With this option, only the surface is saturated with color instead of the entire layer of frosting. Then, the cake is decorated accordingly. Beware though, if the frosting is sprayed too heavily it may show runs or driplines similar to paint.

Tinted frosting typically falls under the category of extra options. It will probably cost extra if you choose a cake that is shown in white frosting, and you change it to hot pink.

If you want to tint your frosting, remember to bring in a swatch(s) of your material for the B/D to match. Will it cost more? Again, it depends on the B/D.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *If you are using dark or odd shades of colors, be aware your B/D can't always match your colors perfectly.*

Most experienced B/Ds will be able to match around 95% of any colors you present them. Just be aware, your color(s) could fall into that 5% group.

Question
5-19:

I am worried the frosting colors on my cake won't match my bridesmaid's dresses or the colors of the swatch I give the Baker/Designer.

I have a really dark red, not burgundy, color for the swirls on my cake. Can she really make the frosting to match my dark red?

This is a rare occurrence with a seasoned cake decorating veteran. This usually happens with inexperienced B/Ds.

Although you should be aware, B/Ds cannot make every color under the rainbow. Mixing frosting is not like mixing paint, which most of the time is blended by a computer. Colors are mixed by hand adding a little of this color and a little of that color. This is especially true when you bring in swatches of material. It is an educated guessing game.

In addition, **the type of lighting at your reception site makes a huge difference. The colors on your cake will look different under incandescent lighting, fluorescent lighting, or natural lighting. (See question 5-20.)**

Most seasoned B/Ds try to match your colors as close as possible, but will tell you they cannot guarantee a match. The other 10% will always say they can match your colors. This is a common trait of the “imposter.” This is where you should consider to...RUN!



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Ask your B/D the date when he or she is going to mix the colors for your cake. Request that you can see them after they are mixed but before they are applied to your cake. Then, you can make a determination whether they match your swatch(es).*

Question
5-20

Does the type of lighting in the room affect the colors on my cake?

Is it true peach flowers can look pink in a poorly lit room?

Yes, lighting affects colors on your wedding cake. This is a common and overlooked item for inexperienced B/Ds

The most common three sources of light for your wedding cake will be:

- Natural sunlight.
- Fluorescent. *(Those long tube lights.)*
- Incandescent. *(What you think of as a common household light bulb.)*

Most B/Ds work under fluorescent lighting. That means when they mix your colors they are being mixed and matched under fluorescent lighting. If your reception uses incandescent lighting, the colors on your cake may look anywhere from one shade off to the next color most closely related to it on the color wheel.

As an example, if your color is peach and the B/D mixes the color under fluorescent lights, the color could appear to look pink under incandescent lightening. In another example, the B/D mixes a dark red under fluorescent lighting, but it could appear to look like burgundy under incandescent lighting.

Unfortunately, we cannot give you a catchall blanket answer for this question. There are so many different types of lighting that give off different casts of colors, no one can predict with certainty how your colors will look with 100% accuracy.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *This is an area where you need to cut your B/D some slack. Your B/D will mix your colors as close as possible to the swatch or other item you bring to them. Just keep in mind, they do not have any control over the lighting at your reception site.*

Question
5-21:

Will the colors on my cake stay true or will heat, humidity, or cold alter their appearance?

Does hot or cold weather affect the look of my colors on the cake?

Yes, your color(s) can be affected by humidity.

No, your colors don't normally change because of heat or cold, although it takes technical knowledge to understand the full explanation. Let me explain it in plain English.

Humidity affects your colors by the condensation buildup on nonporous frostings like buttercream, cream cheese, and ganache. Water droplets form on the frosting surface and cause water spots or discoloration of frosting flowers.

It definitely ruins the appearance of any colored decoration.

Typically, heat only affects your colors if your icing starts melting, then you'll see streaks.

However, at that point, you shouldn't worry about your color, you should worry about your whole cake falling apart! **Heat is disastrous for any wedding cake.**

Cold temperatures have a tendency to mute your colors just a bit. Although, we are not aware of any reception site with their thermostat set at 32 degrees.

Before most B/Ds deliver their wedding cakes, they refrigerate them at a temperature of 34°-40° for 3 to 36 hours with no problem of discoloration.

The exception is for cakes painted with edible paint. The humidity, not the cold temperature has a tendency to make the paint run and drip.

The largest contributing factor to affecting the color on your cake is sunlight. Sunlight fades any color. It takes blue hues on your cake and makes them lavender within minutes. Reds turn to pink, pinks to white, yellow to ivory.

Keep your wedding cake away from windows or any direct sunlight. And don't be fooled, even on a cloudy day there are enough UV rays from the sun to fade your colors.

Question
5-22:

Is using fresh flowers the best way to achieve a beautiful cake?

Every florist I talk to says fresh flowers on a wedding cake looks better than frosting, silk, gumpaste, or rolled fondant flowers. What's your opinion?

Although the question is intended to be serious, it could be considered a trick question. The response will require a dose of philosophy and psychology.

If you are using a novice B/D, who isn't very skilled, they'll use fresh flowers to make any cake look beautiful, even if their decorating or design proficiency is suspect.

Many times, poor designers use fresh flowers as a diversion for their lack of talent. They know your eye will always focus on the flowers and then their lackluster decorations.

Fresh flowers trick the observers mind by making the cake look as though it has a superior appearance.

Here's why your brain is fooled: One of Mother Nature's greatest accomplishments is flowers. What a perfect blend of color and architecture. They immediately dress any surroundings with a pleasant and fulfilling impact. This is also true for using them as part of the decoration on your wedding cake.

Since flowers are viewed as a perfect creation of nature (decoration), placing them on a cake also makes the cake beautiful and perfect. Fresh flowers are such an overwhelming focal point on your wedding cake, the actual decoration by the decorator becomes secondary. When you blend the fresh flowers and cake decorating together, your brain is overwhelmed with the beauty of the flowers. Thus, you see the cake as being gorgeous.

Take this simple litmus test: Take all the fresh flowers off any wedding cake and judge how the rest of the cake looks. You'll quickly understand what we mean.

As a parting note: Fresh flowers typically look best on wedding cakes with a simple design.

One other thing, you have learned a “secret” to buying a wedding cake that looks great for less. (*Order a cake that has a very simple design, add fresh flowers, and save some money.*)

Question

5-23:

I want to use fresh flowers on my cake. Any suggestions?

Where do fresh flowers look the best on a wedding cake?

Fresh flowers do look great. They look great on top of the cake, between the tiers, or on the cake table. Just use a little common sense and take some precautionary measures.

A florist can tell you which flowers are non-treated. In other words, use flowers that haven’t been subjected to chemical spray that would make them poisonous. Plus, the florist can tell you which flowers are naturally poisonous. Obviously, you’ll want to avoid those.

If you are really worried about the flowers and foliage, make sure they are “edible.” As unbelievable as it sounds, we have seen plenty of wedding cakes with holly leafs and berries used as decoration around the Christmas and New Year holidays. (*That is a lawsuit waiting to happen.*)

If you are using someone who isn’t a certified florist because you are trying to save money, ask them about the toxic nature of the flowers. If they seem hesitant in answering...RUN!

Question

5-24:

Should I be choosing particular designs if I am using fresh flowers on my cake?

Do wedding cake designers decorate cakes differently when fresh flowers are being used? What do they do that is different?

This single question could take a whole chapter by itself. Since this book is about your wedding cake and not flowers, we’ll keep the answer short, simple and to the point.

Usually, the answer is, “it doesn’t matter.”

Here are a few quick tips to keep in mind:

- Most of the time, fresh flowers look best on “**simple**” designed cakes.
- Fresh flowers don’t work quite as well on wedding cakes with “**semi-ornate**” designs.
- When you have a “**very complex**” design, fresh flowers usually look great!



PRICELESS ADVICE: *If you don’t mind using different flowers on your wedding cake in place of the ones used on your tables or other areas of your reception area, choose the design of your wedding cake first and then choose flowers that make it look the best.*

We don’t want to oversimplify which flowers work best with which designs, but here’s an easy way to understand this issue. Winter wedding cakes don’t usually work well with daisies or tulips, nor do poinsettias or pinecones in the summer. You are probably thinking, “*Of course, I know that.*”

What we're saying is, just be conscious there are many choices in flowers, and which ones you choose will make a huge difference in the final overall appeal of your cake.

As a reminder from a previous answer, *using pastel flowers on a wedding cake is more reflective of a traditional design approach, while bright vivid flowers give a contemporary feel.*

Question 5-25:	Does the Baker/Designer order and handle the flowers for the cake or does the florist? If I am having fresh flowers on my cake, should I have the florist position them on the cake or the Baker/Designer?
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The real issue is one of overall skill. Some B/Ds want to place the flowers on the wedding cake because they believe the flowers are an important design element in the overall look of the cake. They feel it's their responsibility and they are more capable of making the wedding cake look its best.

These B/Ds have the florist drop off the flowers at the cake shop some of the time, while other times, they have them delivered to the reception site. Either way, the B/D handles the placement of the flowers.

Other B/Ds don't feel comfortable arranging flowers on the wedding cake (*because they don't have the design education or experience working with fresh flowers*) and will have your florist handle the placement of the flowers.

The key to remember: **If you are having your florist arrange the flowers, give them a photo or sketch of the wedding cake, so they can see where the flowers need to go.**

Here's a checklist that will help everyone stay organized:

- *As the bride, make sure you make both the B/D and florist aware of the flowers you are using.*
- *Be clear with both the B/D and the florist which one of them is placing the flowers on the cake.*
- *If the B/D is placing the flowers on the cake prior to its delivery, make sure the flowers are delivered to the B/D the day before or the early morning of your reception. Also, have a photo or illustration to show how you want the flowers arranged.*
- *If the florist is arranging the flowers, make sure the delivery time for the cake is scheduled prior to the florist arriving. Otherwise, the B/D will probably arrange the flowers if they see them lying on or near the cake table. Florists do not like waiting around for the cake to show up.*
- *Give your florist a photocopy of your cake along with the dimensions of each tier. It will assure the correct number of flowers.*



PRICELESS ADVICE: *The biggest problem surveyed B/Ds had with florists were the experience of some of the designers. The designer's most common mistake was having flowers that were too large for a particular wedding cake. This included flowers placed on top of the cake as well as around the base of the cake. In addition, B/Ds complained that florists purposely leave bundles of flowers behind, expecting the B/D to arrange them on the cake.*

Question

5-26:

My mom's wedding cake topper was ugly. Are there any good-looking toppers?

My parents were married 26 years ago. My mom said there wasn't much choice for toppers in the 90's. Is that still the case today?

Whether a wedding cake topper is ugly or gorgeous is for you to decide. As a veteran of the wedding cake business, I can tell you wedding cake toppers have improved immensely in looks and quality since the year 2005. In addition, there are "20" times the companies and individuals that produce toppers.

You can find everything from traditional couples to same-sex couples, to themed couples such as western wear, military uniforms, and motorcycle riding couples. You can find cutesy pigs, cows, ducks, bunnies, and Ma and Pa Kettle couples.

The popular trend over the last 10 years has been monogram initials, either one larger one for the couple's last name or three initials, two for the couple's first names and one for the last name.

In the last 5 years, it has been laser-cut wording like, "Mr. & Mrs. Smith" or words such as "Love Lasts Forever."

The vast variety of options is bringing brides back to using wedding cake toppers. If you look, we think you might be pleasantly surprised.

Anyone can put fresh flowers on top of a wedding cake and make it look "beautiful." **To have an unusual topper that is interesting and unique can be memorable and create a "WOW" factor.**

Question

5-27:

How far in advance should I order my cake topper?

Is there any reason I should order my topper more than 2 months in advance?

Sometimes ordering a particular cake topper, with a baker, has more to do about volume purchasing than time. Here's what we mean. Most manufacturers of cake toppers sell their toppers in bulk quantities.

The B/D must place a minimum order of 3, 6, or 12 toppers to get a shipment. If you are the first person toward their next shipment, you could be waiting for 2-3 months.

If you need to order a topper, the consensus advice is to order 3-4 months in advance. This gives you enough time in case they send the wrong topper, it breaks in shipment, the color is wrong, or a host of other problems that could arise.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Getting a topper is so much easier now than it used to be. Ordering a wedding cake topper is only a matter of waiting a month or even a few days off the Internet.*

You won't have to wait for another topper shipment or be forced to buy something in the B/D's store. You literally have thousands of choices from hundreds of producers and receive delivery overnight! Many B/Ds have stopped carrying toppers for just that reason; because they can't compete with the variety on the Internet.

Question
5-28:

What should I do if the cake topper I ordered doesn't look as good as the one on display?

Can I return a special-order cake topper if it isn't exactly as seen on display?

First of all, buy the topper on display. If the B/D says it's only a display model and you'll have to order it. **Always, always order your cake topper as far in advance as possible.**

Do not make the mistake of having your B/D order it at the last minute. From the combined experience of 24 B/Ds, they say a shipment of toppers can be immediate or take up to six weeks. Remember, that is if there are no problems.

If you order your wedding cake and topper 3-9 months in advance, get them to order the topper immediately. Allow yourself a large cushion for problems. Upon arrival, have your B/D give you a call for your inspection. Also, you might consider taking the topper and storing it at home until a week or two before the wedding if you are nervous, they might break or lose it.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *We spoke with one bride who sent back her topper four times before it was correct. The whole process took around nine weeks to get resolved. This is a good example of why you should order early.*

Question
5-29:

My cake topper is really big and heavy. Do I need to worry about it falling?

I have an expensive Lladro cake topper which is tall and heavy, how can I be sure it won't fall and break?

Yes, there is a chance it could fall. On the other hand, any B/D who has experience with large and heavy cake toppers knows how to properly support it.

If you didn't purchase the topper from the B/D who is decorating your bridal cake, **always—always bring it to the B/D to show them how large and heavy it is.**

Here is a check list of what your B/D needs to know: a) how tall it is, b) how wide it is, c) how heavy it is, and d) what color it is. Let me explain the “why” behind all four of these questions.

- 1) **How tall is it?** If it goes on top of the cake, a really short or tall topper can look odd and improperly sized. If it goes in-between the tiers, you need to know it will fit. All too often a bride will buy a topper that is 12” tall, but it needs to fit in-between 10” pillars.
- 2) **How wide is it?** If the base of your topper is 8” wide, but the top tier of your wedding cake is 6” wide, you have a problem.
- 3) **How heavy is it?** This is a concern when your topper is placed on top of the cake. If your topper is heavy, your B/D will put some sort of support in the top tier to accommodate the topper's weight. Without support, your topper will most likely dig into the cake resulting in cracked or bulging sides. Or worse, your topper could slowly lean to one side until it falls off.
- 4) **What color(s) is it?** There are usually two reasons a B/D wants to know the color. First, a B/D wants to match the color of the frosting on the wedding cake to the color of the topper. This is usually the case when the color of the topper is all ivory. The second reason, when the B/D wants to match colors on the topper to the colors being used for hand-made flowers on the cake.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *Here’s an example of why you want your B/D to see your topper! A few years ago, a bride told me her topper had pink and purple colors on it. She requested the baker use those same colors for the gum paste flowers they were making on her wedding cake.*

Further, she said the cake topper was in another city and would not be available before the reception for them to see. They proceeded to decorate the cake in pink and purple flowers as she requested, only to find out the actual colors on the topper were dusty rose (a dull brownish pink) and lavender (light purple). Needless to say, the topper and flowers did not match.

Some brides do not feel comfortable leaving their topper with the B/D, which is understandable.

The 3 top reasons are:

- *Because it is a family heirloom.*
- *It is very expensive.*
- *They simply prefer to bring it to the reception site themselves.*

Just remember, if you decide not to leave it with your B/D, **always make sure they see it at least one month before your reception.** This gives them adequate time to address any of the four check listed items.

Question
5-30:

Do certain wedding cake designs lend themselves better than others for a cake topper?

Are wedding cakes ever designed around a wedding cake topper or is that even a concern?

In most instances, you should decide on a wedding cake design first and then choose a topper that goes with the design.

We did find cases where a bride received a cake topper as an engagement or bridal shower gift. The bride then took the topper to a B/D to create a cake design that took elements from the topper. This approach to designing a wedding cake is rare, although it is a very good idea.

Here is a common rule-of-thumb; 90% of all toppers will look fine with any wedding cake design. Most of the time, it becomes a personal preference issue, not a design conflict.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC TIP: *Here’s another interesting side note to our research; I was astonished to find out that the majority of brides choose fresh flowers for the top of their wedding cake because...it didn’t require any additional shopping or time making another decision.*

We found by the time brides order their wedding cake, a fair number of them are tired of making decisions about their wedding. So, since they already have flowers for the wedding, they just add some to the top of their cake.

If you want to stand out from the crowd and not do what everybody else is doing, get a cake topper that fits your personality. Your guests will love it.

Question
5-31:

Should a cake be decorated differently based upon an afternoon or evening wedding?

What do I look for in a design to tell whether it is for an afternoon or evening wedding reception?

This is myth perpetuated by a handful of bridal websites.

We imagine they believe it helps them appear to be informed and say distinctive things their competitors are not saying.

Nonetheless, our research showed no instances where a professional B/D recommended different flavors of cake, filling, frosting, flowers, or decoration for an afternoon reception versus an evening reception.

We must admit, it is a clever marketing tactic. Perhaps our Gold Standard Bakers should brainstorm over the possibility of creating designs for afternoon receptions. For now, don't give it a second thought.

Question
5-32:

Are there certain cake designs for the different seasons?

I am getting married in the winter and have been researching websites for a winter design. However, they all just list pages and pages of photos. How do I know which are winter designs?

Yes, you will find B/Ds who offer designs for each season. Although, we found most brides either have not thought about having a design that incorporates seasonality or they are not considering it.

As an example, our surveys yielded the percentage of brides who have a winter design for 2022-2023 at only 20%. A winter design typically utilizes snowflakes, icicles, penguins, snowmen, ice-skating, snow-covered mountains, and/or the use of sparkle dust.

The best B/Ds change their in-store displays based on each of the four seasons. For example, in the winter, you'll find plenty of designs that incorporate snowflakes, or dark colors with bold designs. In the spring, they will display cakes with various pastel colors using delicate and daintier flowers. In the summer, they will display both pastel and bold colors using every design pattern known to the universe. And in the fall, you'll see cakes with vivid fall-colored mums, leaves, corn stalks and pumpkins.

If you have your heart set on a seasonal design, simply use your favorite search engine to find something you like, or ask B/Ds you're interviewing to show you some designs they've previously created.

Question
5-33:

I am getting married for the second time, is there a difference in how the cake should be decorated?

This is my second marriage, and I am going to have a full wedding and reception. Should the wedding cake be decorated differently?

The short answer is no.

Yet, we did find websites that were offering varying opinions.

This is where surveying B/Ds came in handy. Not one of them offered wedding cakes or made the suggestion to have their wedding cakes decorated differently.

When we asked brides, who had been married more than once about their experience for choosing a design, they told us they decided to be “*cutesier*” with the design on the second go-around.

The bride who was getting married a second time had a higher tendency to have a themed cake. Such as a castle cake, a seashell theme, and cakes with designs that incorporate animals, mountains, the love of Broadway, or landmarks like the Eiffel tower.

Many brides getting married for the second time told us they didn’t spend very much money on their first wedding cake because their parents or guardian paid for it.

This time, they were getting what they wanted...with the price being secondary.

Question 5-34:	I am worried the cake layers (tiers) will be too thin (short) instead of the height displayed in the photo or display, what can I do? A friend of mine’s wedding cake had really thin tiers and it looked horrible, how can I prevent it from happening to me?
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This question is rarely brought up, but an important one. Interestingly, 15% of brides responded by stating, “*Yeah, now that you bring it up, my cake layers (tiers) were not as tall or thick as they looked in the photo or on the display.*”

Using conventional wisdom, you would think the layers would be as thick (*tall*) as you had seen them.

Most B/Ds admitted, from time-to-time, they had tiers that were shorter than what they should have been. So, we surveyed our group of experts for an answer.

There are two reasons why this happens. First, most of the time cake layers are weighed on a scale prior to baking.

For example, a 12-inch pan is scaled at 2 lbs. 8 oz. of cake batter, which bakes off at a height of 2 inches”. If it takes two layers to make one tier, the cake should be around 4 inches thick (*tall*).

Sometimes, technical reasons or human error prevent the cake from baking to its proper height, resulting in a tier which is only 3 inches or 3½-inches thick instead of 4 inches. Second, the cakes bake off at a total height of 4 inches tall, but an employee levels off the cakes at only 3½-inches.

Here’s how you can prevent this from happening to you. **Ask your B/D what the individual heights of the tiers are for your cake.**

For example, if you are ordering a standard 150 serving cake, you’ll typically receive 4 tiers of cake 4-inch-tall equaling 16 inches”.

If your B/D says the individual tiers are 4 inches tall, ask them to write it down on your wedding cake agreement.

Obviously, there are wedding cakes that use 2-inch-tall tiers as well as 6-inch tall tiers. You'll need to verify how tall they will be for your cake, based upon the image you have chosen.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *Until this question was analyzed by our GSBs, it never occurred to them to actually tell their brides exactly what thickness each individual tier would be for their wedding cake. At this time, all the B/Ds involved in our research, level their cakes at exact heights according to what the photo shows and the wedding cake agreement states. Make sure your B/D does the same.*

Question 5- 35:	Are there certain shapes of wedding cakes that make one wedding cake more spectacular than another? I want my guests to be blown away with my wedding cake. What shape of cake would make their mouths drop?
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Although the shape of a wedding cake can have a great influence on overall appearance, it is the design that defines a spectacular wedding cake.

To understand our point, look at some of the best wedding cake designers on the Internet or in bridal magazines. They can take round or square layers and make them 10 times more spectacular than an average B/D. They don't need octagonal, tear drop, or diamond shapes to create a mind-blowing cake.

It is the artistic eye and mind that creates mouth-dropping centerpieces. If a certain shape happens to work with a design the artist believes will work better with a particular shape, they'll use it.

(An example of tying together creativity and unusual shapes used to be the highly popular "topsy-turvy" wedding cakes. They use cake layers cut and stacked at angles. It gives the cake a whimsical feel.)

We suggest staying focused on the design first. If a certain shape enhances the design, then go for it. Otherwise, the answer is no.

Question 5- 36:	Will most Baker/Designers add decorated dummy cakes to make the appearance of my wedding cake larger than it really is? I am only having a reception for 100 guests, but I want my cake to resemble a wedding cake that serves 500. Will most Baker/Designers decorate large dummy cakes for the bottom tiers and then use real cakes for the upper tiers to serve 100? What is the price difference?
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This is one of those hyped-up "trends." Using dummy cakes is not catching on fire. According to our last survey of this question (June '21) of 350 B/Ds, out of the approximate 5,000 wedding cakes they made, only 12 wedding cakes that used this design feature.

Why isn't it catching on? Because in most cases, you just don't save that much money. Remember that old equation 70% of a cake's price is determined by the design. **It isn't going to change because you incorporate some Styrofoam dummies.**

The amount of labor to decorate the cake will still be the same. Also, Styrofoam is required to replace the cake, which is costly.

What savings there are, comes from the price of the cake versus the Styrofoam and the fact that Styrofoam is easier to work with than real cake.

In our surveys, most B/Ds reduce the price of the overall cake by 10%-20%. Typically, the larger the cake, the larger the discount.

Here's what we mean. If you are making a real wedding cake for 200 servings versus making a wedding cake for 200 that is half-real and half-Styrofoam, the savings would be closer to 10%.

If the wedding cake is 5 feet tall and would serve 1000, the cost savings would be closer to 20% if you made the top tiers to serve 200 out of real cake and the bottom 800 out of Styrofoam.

A more cost-effective and efficient way to approach the “dummy” wedding cake is to rent a prepared dummy wedding cake from a B/D who offers this service and then serve prepared sheet cakes to your guests. The typical cost-savings will be around 50%.

This method is the most cost-effective if you have a guest list of 300+. For example, you can rent a typical 200 serving wedding cake for \$150-\$250. The actual cost for a real wedding cake will vary between \$600 and \$1200. If you purchase sheet cakes for around \$200 you will save between 40%-70%. These percentages will typically go down with smaller receptions and go up with larger ones.

The biggest problem with rented dummy cakes is the limited decoration and colors of decoration you can receive. You may be only able to choose from 20 varieties versus unlimited decorations on a real wedding cake.

If you are on a limited budget, this is a valid money-saving technique to get a very nice centerpiece.

Question 5-37:	Do most Baker/designers provide a cake stand? Do they typically charge for them and how much? Do most Baker/Designers include a cake stand or some type of platform for the cake included in the cake price?
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Every B/D we interviewed carries cake stands. However, there is a big difference in the selection of stands they carry. You'll have to ask to see each B/Ds selection.

Ten years ago, only 1 in 15 brides were using a cake stand or can be referred to as a platform. (*A cake stand goes under the cake.*) As of March 2021, approximately 1 in 4 brides are using one type of stand or another. The trend is clearly upward.

One of the main reasons stands are so popular is that about 95% of brides are getting their cake tiers stacked together instead of using tier separators.

In essence, the cake stand has replaced tier separators to give the cake more height.

The rental price of a stand is up to the B/D. Some include it with the price of the cake, and some charge a nominal rental fee with a deposit.

You can also contact a rental company or your caterer to see what styles they carry and how much they charge. We found the average rental fees to range from \$20-\$100 per day.

Remember to return them on time (*usually within 3 days*), clean (*don't bring them back with frosting gunked all over*), and undamaged. (*If you bring back a cake stand that is cracked...it's broken!*) Expect to receive back your deposit the way you paid for it, unless otherwise stated in your agreement.

Question

5-38:

How long does it take to create a wedding cake from start to finish?

How much time is my Baker/Designer spending on my wedding cake?

We asked 350 B/Ds how long, on average, does it take you to bake and decorate a 150 serving four-tiered wedding cake, with four different flavors of cake, frosted with regular butter cream frosting and adorned with a moderate amount of decoration.

They responded with an average time estimate between 5 to 16 hours.

Now, let's dissect how they arrived at this answer:

- 1) Mixing and baking cake batters and the frosting: 1.5-2.5 hours.
- 2) Putting the layers together and leveling them after they are cooled: 1-1.5 hours.
- 3) Frosting the cake: 30 min–1 hour.
- 4) Placing and supporting the tiers on top of each other: 30 min-1 hour.
- 5) Decorating the cake: 1.5 - 10 hours.

For cakes that have a higher degree of difficulty, the time period can increase dramatically. As an extreme example, we spoke with a B/D who only caters to high-end clients. She stated her cakes take an average of 40 to 120 labor hours from start to finish.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *The amount of time creating your cake is a major determining factor in its final cost. If a cake looks like it takes a long time to make, it probably does. On average, you'll pay \$45-\$150 for every hour spent working on your bridal cake.*

Question

5-39:

I am paying \$3500 for my wedding cake. Are they are overcharging me?

My wedding cake sure seems like it costs a lot at a cost of \$2,000 for 100 guests or \$20 per serving. That seems excessive. Are they gouging me?

Since the question raises the issue of money, we want to explain what really goes into designing and selling a wedding cake that costs \$2,000 or \$3,500. It's a lot more than just throwing together some flour, eggs, and frosting.

It first starts with the overhead of the bake shop. About 10% of the price is for fixed costs like rent, electricity, gas, water, taxes, office supply, leased equipment, insurance and so forth. Those are items a bride usually doesn't think about. Approximately 16%-28% is the *cost of the materials* for your wedding cake. Labor provided by an average B/D runs about 35%. That leaves around 33% profit.

Not a bad profit margin, but we're going to explain...*what it takes to really earn it*. We call it ***"Separating Real Cake Designers from Imposters."***

If you are paying \$2,000 for a wedding cake, you are not typically visiting your average B/D. Any B/D who charges a couple grand for a wedding cake has earned the right to charge that much.

A “**Cake Artist**” should be easily recognizable from the “**Imposter.**” In the cake decorating field, it’s like comparing a brain surgeon to a family practitioner. Yes, they’re both doctors, but one has an immense amount of education and knowledge for his/her specialty.

A “Cake Artist” also shares this same characteristic with the “Imposter.” However, a family practitioner will not operate on your brain, but the imposter will try to decorate a wedding cake they don’t have the foggiest clue of knowing how to do...just to get the order!

The B/D who charges \$2,000 most likely has invested thousands of hours in their craft to become proficient in many decorating techniques.

Cake artists surround themselves with the most talented employees they can find. They also pay more for ingredients. When it comes to decorating your cake, they will probably spend two to three days if not longer making it. All of these measures are applied to earn the \$2,000.

Don’t automatically assume they are gouging you because your cake costs \$2000. (Nod once if you get it.)

Now, if “*Cheatum’s Cake Shop*” down the street with three wedding cake displays that are covered in an inch of dust and designs from the disco era charges \$2,000...RUN!

Don’t be delusional and think you can shop a B/D who charges \$2,000 against a B/D who will make it for \$500. THEY DO NOT HAVE THE SAME SKILL LEVEL, NOR DO THEY USE QUALITY INGREDIENTS. You will get what you pay for. *(My brain is hurting just trying to make this point.)*



“PERSONAL-MANIAC TIP: *It is much safer to shop B/Ds against each other when the cake is \$500 or less. At that price level, you do not have to worry about the B/D’s skill level quite as much.*



Eye-Opening Topic 6 — Quality

How To Avoid Dry Tasteless Cakes and Greasy or Gritty Frosting That Sticks to The Roof of Your Mouth or in Your Teeth. Yikes!

Receiving a great-tasting (*quality*) cake ranks near the top of almost every bride's list. Over the last twenty years, cake flavors have transitioned from traditional vanilla (*white*) cake to literally hundreds of cake flavors and fillings.

In a recent poll of our “Gold Standard Wedding Cake Bakers” they reported 95% of brides are ordering wedding cakes other than vanilla.

In our research, we found by a margin of 54% to 46% of brides rate the taste of the cake as important if not more important than the design of the cake.

B/Ds who have been operating a bakery for over 25 years tell us today's brides are much more demanding when it comes to a moist, flavorful cake. Our research shows B/Ds are listening and they have changed to meet the current demands of their customers.

You still need to do your homework because there are scores of B/Ds who are selling cakes you might think are dry and tasteless, or have greasy, or gritty frosting.

Question
6-1:

How do I judge the quality of a cake?

Are there any criteria to critique the flavor of cakes?

The easy answer is to ask for sample cakes from the B/Ds you are interviewing. Here's a second strategy. Order one of the "sample" flavors in a full-sized cake for any upcoming special occasion, like a birthday, and see if it is as good or even better than the original samples.

Don't pay a lot of attention to B/Ds who give you a hyped-up ingredient list, like they raise their own cows to churn fresh butter, grow and mill fresh flour right there on the back 40, or use eggs so fresh they were just laid this morning.

It doesn't matter what expensive brands they use, how fresh their ingredients are, or that their baker has a PhD in culinary arts. The only thing that matters is that the cake, filling if you are using one, and frosting tastes...GREAT!



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Don't be sold on their hype, let their cakes do the talking!!*

Question
6-2:

What makes one wedding cake better than the next?

What advice can you give me to tell if one baker's cake is better than another?

No magic here, it really comes down to "personal preference."

Besides, the question can be taken two ways. First, better could refer to "taste" and the second, better could refer to "decoration." They are separate variables.

The better question is relative to your likes and dislikes. Question 5-8, which describes the "**Picasso Syndrome**," makes it clear why brides view cake artistry as a personal preference issue.

You can make the same argument for the flavor, taste, and moistness of a cake. Different people like different things. That is why you need to "taste-test" cakes, fillings, and frostings.

Everything comes down to your personal preferences.

Here's an actual story from a bride that illustrates her personal taste in food and how she chose her B/D.

Sarah grew up in the south eating at her favorite hamburger place once a week. The hamburgers were the **greasiest** hamburgers you could imagine. However, she absolutely loved them with a passion. When she went to college, she couldn't find a greasy hamburger anywhere; not in the school cafeteria, not at any franchise, not anywhere.

Every month she couldn't wait to go home to have the **best** hamburgers in the world.

In addition to hamburgers, as a child, Sarah also loved eating her grandmother's chocolate cake every Saturday afternoon. Do you think she was influenced by her previous exposure to what she considers great chocolate cake? Do you think she might search for a B/D that made a chocolate cake similar to her grandmother's?

She did.

Keep this story in mind when you are shopping for a B/D and wedding cake. The answer is not always clear. Sometimes your heart just takes over.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *The moral to the story is for you to recognize all the experiences you have grown up with that could influence your choices of cake flavors and design decisions. Take some time to reflect about your past and use it as an opportunity to incorporate happy memories.*

Question
6-3:

How do I make sure the cake is moist?

I do not want to get stuck with a dry cake. What can I do to make sure mine is moist?

The only way you will know for sure is to do a "Taste-Testing." Order samples of cake from at least 3 different B/D's. If it is possible, do it all on the same day. Then you can compare apples to apples, while they are fresh in your memory.

Here's a warning though; most B/D's will want you to taste the cake at their bakery.

There isn't anything wrong with that, but think twice before you agree. Here's why. In psychology, there is a principle called the **"Commitment Principle."**

Basically, **it means we are committed to our own decisions and beliefs.** Examples include marriage, going to the same church, using the same shampoo, staying at the same job, sticking it out with a lousy sports team, etc.

In your case, a B/D wants you to taste the cake in their store because it makes you **"committed" to the idea of buying it from them.** Just think about it, you're sitting down with the B/D as they are staring at you eating their cake. They know their cake tastes great and if you agree, why wouldn't you buy from them?

The fact that you agree with them makes you **more committed** to the idea of buying from them.

The same sales technique is used at beauty counters of major department stores to sell you make-up and auto dealerships that let you take that new car home for the weekend. They both know that if you become the least bit **"committed"**...*they can sell you.*

You'll avoid all those psychological influences if you take the sample cakes home and test them with your family or friends. They'll give you their honest opinions and you'll avoid the pressures of the **"Commitment Principle."**



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *If you take home all your test samples from 3 wedding cake providers on the same day and test them side by side, you'll quickly realize which cakes are the best.*

Question
6-4:

How do I get a baker to guarantee the freshness of his/her cakes?

My best friend's wedding cake did not taste very fresh, how do I guarantee one for myself?

We decided to use the question of freshness and perform research on an overall guarantee for your wedding cake.

We asked B/Ds whether they had a **written guarantee** covering their cake flavors, frosting, freshness, taste, decoration, design, colors, and delivery. We wanted to know if they guaranteed anything or everything.

Unfortunately, over 98% of the B/Ds we surveyed do not have a written guarantee covering any aspect of your wedding cake!

So, what can you do? Here's what you need to keep in mind; **if it's not an industry standard to carry a guarantee, it will be difficult to get one...from anybody... not just the person or company you would like to use.**

Further, just asking for a guarantee may label you as a potential "*problem customer*." As odd as this sounds, many of the B/Ds we surveyed stated the same concern. They felt if a bride wanted a guarantee, they were probably looking for a way to get some sort of refund later.

Due to this being such a problematic issue, we hope our widespread recognition of this concern will prompt B/Ds across the country, including yours, to begin writing one for your peace of mind.

*(All of the current **Gold Standard Wedding Cake Bakers** do have written guarantees. They were not included in the survey results.)*



PRICELESS ADVICE: *If you ask questions from "32 Bakery Buster Questions Most Bakers Hope And Pray You Don't Ask" in the appendix section, you will be doing everything to guarantee yourself a great-tasting and great looking wedding cake without the B/D having a written guarantee.*

Question
6-5:

Do most Baker/Designers offer free samples?

How can I check out the flavors of several bakers' cakes? Do they charge for them?

We found over 99% of B/Ds offer one of two methods for you to try their cakes. They are:

- a. Offer free samples of flavors you would like to test without limitation, or some B/Ds had limits for the number of flavors you could test for free, along with a small charge for any additional samples. *(e.g. You receive the first 3-4 samples for free and pay a minimal charge of \$1-\$5 per cake for every additional sample.)*

- b. Charge a fee of \$25-\$75 for making samples of your choice or a regular sampling of their most popular flavors, which also includes a consultation. If you order a wedding cake from them, they apply the fee toward your cake purchase.

Question
6-6:

Should I ask what kinds of ingredients are used in the cake?

Do all Baker/Designers offer cakes, which are dairy free, sugar free, salt free, gluten free, egg free etc.?

We're going to answer this as a two-part question. First, let's address it as a quality issue and second, as a health concern.

QUALITY: While it is typically true, better ingredients equals a better cake, many times it is the types of ingredients and the ratio of ingredients that makes a better cake.

I remember being in food chemistry class testing the moisture levels of cakes using differing amounts and various types of ingredients to produce a very moist and tasty cake. I can tell you firsthand, the ratios of the ingredients were more important than the brand name and cost of the ingredients.

HEALTH: If you are concerned about health issues for yourself or some of your guests, here are a few reasons you may want to ask this question.

The first reason is for **allergic reactions**. Today, more than ever, more people seem to be allergic to all kinds of foodstuffs. Let me give you a rundown of what some of your guests might be allergic to:

Wheat flour, milk, butter, whey, sugar, eggs, nuts, such as peanuts or walnuts, fruits such as strawberries, raspberries...

Hum...isn't that everything in a cake?

My point is this; brides are beginning to let their guests know ahead of time what they are serving to avoid ingredient problems that could cause medical concerns.

The second reason is the move toward more **organic ingredients**. If you typically eat organic fruits and vegetables, you might want to choose a B/D who makes their cakes from scratch without the use of any artificial or non-organic ingredients.

The third reason is a **disease such as alcoholism**. If you serve a filling laced with Irish Crème, Rum, or Grand Marnier, it might taste heavenly to most of your guests, but could be devastating to others. *(If alcohol is baked in the cake, the alcohol bakes out leaving only the flavor.)*

In our surveys, we found a few B/Ds who suggested getting a tier of refined sugar-free cake for the diabetics at your reception. It is something worth considering, since it is estimated that 1 in 12 people are diabetic. However, there is one big problem. It's not just sugar or flour in a cake, there are other considerations. For a diabetic it's all about counting total carbs, whether it's refined sugar, flour, raisins, or honey etc.

Results from surveys indicate approximately 2 in 5 B/Ds carry ingredients or are willing to bake special request wedding cakes all year around. You're simply going to have to search for them.

Question
6-7:

What ways can you cut corners, but not the quality?
Do I have to sacrifice quality if I need to save money?

This is a philosophical question addressing the meaning of QUALITY.

Our best suggestion is to keep it “*real*.” **Real in the sense you cannot have a high-quality product using lower cost materials or procedures to create the product.**

It is like saying, “*How can I buy a Gucci handbag for less?*” The answer is, buy an imitation. Otherwise, you can’t cut corners by taking out the lining, using less stitching, changing the outer material and still retain Gucci quality.

But Gucci does make purses in different price ranges depending on the number of materials used, the size, the design, and the labor.

The same is true for your wedding cake. **Find a quality B/D and then buy the lowest cost wedding cake they offer.** You will still receive quality cake, frosting, and a simple design. It just won’t be the best or most fancy wedding cake they offer.

The usual tips are to:

- *Select a plain vanilla cake.*
- *Use buttercream frosting.*
- *Keep the decoration simple.*
- *Use buttercream flowers on the cake instead of fresh, silk, gum paste or royal icing flowers.*
- *Put buttercream flowers on top of the cake instead of purchasing a topper or using fresh flowers.*
- *Pick-up the cake yourself.*

Notice, all of these steps did not change the quality of your cake, but they could save you money.

Question
6-8:

How far in advance do most Bakers/Designers bake their cakes?
I hate dry cakes; will my cake be made the day before my wedding?

This can be a tricky question to understand. You can’t jump to conclusions when a B/D says they start baking your cake the Monday before your Saturday wedding reception.

It is a common myth to believe your B/D bakes and decorates your wedding cake the same day or the day before it is delivered to you.

The fact is most B/Ds create your cake in stages. They are:

- 1) Gathering the baking ingredients.
- 2) Mixing the baking ingredients.
- 3) Baking the cake.
- 4) Thoroughly cooling the cake at room temperature.
- 5) Placing the cake in the refrigerator.
- 6) Dumping the cakes from pans.

- 7) Making fillings if the B/D makes their own.
- 8) Making frosting(s.)
- 9) Trimming cakes and putting layers together with frostings or fillings.
- 10) Either placing the cakes back in refrigeration or freezing them.
- 11) Thawing cakes in refrigeration or at room temperature until about 40°-45°.
- 12) Covering cakes with intended frosting.
- 13) Decorating and placing them back in refrigeration or leave out at room temperature.

(Explaining all the variables for which cakes can or should be refrigerated and which ones do not need to be or cannot be refrigerated is irrelevant for this explanation.)

Your B/D creates your wedding cake in stages for two reasons.

The first reason is simply to work your cake into a time schedule that allows him or her to work on other cake projects, while keeping your project moving to completion.

Second, all B/Ds have made cakes that were over-baked, under-baked, awful tasting, fell apart because they were put together while being too fresh, fillings that separated and made the cake soggy or oozed out the sides.

In addition, frostings that melted, got hard, or fell off the cake, and worst of all, cakes that did not make it into the walk-in refrigerator in a timely fashion to be delivered.

It boils down to safeguards. **After a B/D has made hundreds of wedding cakes, their experience tells them to take a systematic approach to baking, filling, frosting, and decorating your cake to reduce the chances of any problems.**

So, now you know, don't freak out when you find out your cake was baked 2 weeks ago. Just remember, it is all in the handling process.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *As long as the cakes are covered while they are frozen or refrigerated during this typical 3-7-day process (or even longer), your cake will be fine. It will not lose any appreciable moisture and you should not notice the difference. All reputable and experienced B/Ds use either the described process or one similar to it.*

The B/Ds you need to worry about are the ones that do not have or do not use refrigeration. The typical line you'll hear is, "I don't use refrigeration because it dries the cakes out." If they use that line...RUN!.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *Of the B/Ds surveyed, most of them prefer never to discuss their approach to the wedding cake process. Their experience, for the most part, is always negative when they try to explain why it takes 3-7 days to create a wedding cake. They told us that as soon as they say the cake is baked 5 days in advance, all the bride thinks is, "My cake is going to be old, dry, and stale."*

Instead, they tell their brides, "We begin making your cakes 2-3 days in advance," or simply state, "The cakes are guaranteed fresh, so, there isn't a reason to be concerned. (Which is true.)"

Question
6-9:

How far in advance will most Baker/Designers decorate my wedding cake?
Is my wedding cake decorated the day of my wedding?

This depends upon the complexity of your order and if there are any adornments that need to be made ahead of time for the cake.

For example, if you are having handmade sugar flowers for your cake, they can be made weeks, even months ahead of time.

The same goes for swags, different sized circles, stars etc. made from rolled fondant or gum paste.

Okay, aside from any special items that need to be pre-made for the cake, **the typical wedding cake is decorated anywhere from finishing it the same day up to 3 days in advance.**

There are B/Ds who decorate and freeze wedding cakes a couple of weeks before they are needed because of productions issues, but that's the exception.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *Most B/Ds do not have a choice but to make your wedding cake the same week. It isn't because they wouldn't like to make it further in advance, but the fact is, they have limited refrigeration and shelf space to store wedding cakes.*

Most B/Ds would love to be able to decorate your wedding cake earlier in the week when business is slower, but it isn't practical for them. So, by default, most B/Ds decorate your wedding cake right before it's scheduled for delivery. That pretty much makes it a win-win for everyone.

Question
6-10:

How many days after the wedding does the left-over cake stay fresh?

I am going to order more cake than I need for my reception so I can have leftovers for family and friends; how long should I expect the cake to stay fresh?

This depends on the type of cake, filling, and frosting on your cake.

If you have a frosting or filling made with fresh cream, eggs, or cream cheese (*all considered dairy*) the cake will start to grow bacteria within 4 hours in a 72-degree room. Most B/Ds will tell you to discard the leftover cake at the reception. (*Most wedding cakes are delivered and set out for an average of 3-6 hours.*)

If your wedding cake is frosted in non-dairy buttercream and has a filling that uses preservatives, such as a raspberry, cherry, or lemon, you are probably alright to wrap up the leftovers.

Although bacteria will begin growing within 4 hours, they will probably not multiply as fast or permeate the rest of the cake nearly as quickly. It should be okay to wrap up leftovers and take them home. (*Don't misunderstand, we are not making a declarative statement that your cake will not spoil. We do not know what ingredients your B/D is using.*)

Remember to refrigerate immediately. Don't keep the cake for longer than 3 days in the refrigerator. Freezing your cake will give you the longest life.

Remember, this is general advice. Ask your B/D and get the right answer.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Make sure you refrigerate the leftovers. We have heard people state, "Refrigerated cake is hard and dry tasting. I always leave mine covered, on the counter, until it is gone." That is a stomachache waiting to happen!*

We won't dispute eating cake straight from the refrigerator has a tendency to be hard and dry-tasting. All you need to do is take the cake out of the refrigerator and let it come back to room temperature before eating it.

Here is the technical reason: When you refridgerate the cake and frosting, the fats (butter) and sugars in the cake and frosting harden, which results in what seems to be a dry cake. So, to reclaim a moist cake and soft frosting, simply bring it back to room temperature. Bon appetit!

Question
6-11:

How do I save the top layer of my wedding cake for my first-year anniversary without being freezer burnt and tasting gross?

Can I save the top tier of my wedding cake in the freezer for one whole year without it tasting nasty?

With the help of Gold Standard Bakers, we wrote the *"1st Anniversary Survival Guide. How to Make Sure the Top Tier of Your Wedding Cake Survives in the Deep Freeze for One Year."* To receive the complete instructions, go to the appendix section.



Eye-Opening Topic 7 — Cake-Filling-Flavor-Frosting

You May Love the Flavor of Kiwi and Spinach Filling Nestled Inside a Pumpkin Sponge Cake (Huh?), But It's A 50-1 Bet Your Guests Won't: Here's Some Insightful Questions to Help You Choose Flavors That Will Make Your Cake Vanish Quicker Than Free Hundred Dollar Bills.

A recurring theme from brides reveals you will have to try 3-5 different B/Ds before you find 2 that have both tasty and great looking cakes. In addition, many brides stated B/Ds tended to have “over-the-top” flavors that sounded wonderful, but they wouldn't serve them to their guests. The reasons are numerous, but at the top is simply, *“I am not sure my guests would like that particular flavor and I don't want to take the chance they won't.”*

These statistics demonstrate you will have to do a lot more shopping for your wedding cake than your mother did.

Prior going to any B/D's store, get a list of their flavors and fillings. There is no reason to spend 1-3 hours of your time going through their designs only to discover their flavors are not appealing.

Question
7-1:

Do most Baker/Designers allow you to have a different cake flavor for each individual tier? Should I have just one flavor or several?

Are most brides getting different flavors for each tier of their wedding cake?

Yes, this is one of those unusual times that we found 100% agreement. Every surveyed B/D has enough flavors of cakes to offer you a different flavor for each tier of cake whether you are having 2 tiers or 8.

This may have not been true 20 years ago, but now *it is common practice for B/Ds to have at least a dozen flavors of cakes and a dozen types of fillings.*

If the flavor of cake and/or filling is important enough for you to choose a B/D based upon cake variety over decoration, I suggest calling every B/D you can locate in your area or go to their website. You may be surprised at the varieties you have to choose from. (Remember, get samples.)

Twenty years ago, your guests would have expected to receive a white (*vanilla flavor*) cake. That was the acceptable and traditional type of cake to serve.

Today, 100% of brides serve other flavors than vanilla. As an example, in a 4-tiered 150 serving wedding cake, you could have the bottom tier strawberry, the next tier lemon, the next tier carrot, and the top tier spice.

10% of brides are still very traditional or want to save money by choosing vanilla.

Question 7-2:	What are the best cake flavors for my guests to enjoy? Which cake flavors will make everyone happy? Do you have suggested cake flavors that are suitable for all my guests?
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The region of the country where your reception is held is the largest determining factor. I'm not saying you can't get the flavor you want no matter where you live, but the flavors B/Ds offer are many times dictated by the types of cake preferred by the people living in that area.

For example, you won't find too many B/Ds offering key lime cake or mango filling in Seattle or Chicago, like you will in Miami.

Like many other choices a B/D offers, cake flavors will vary from B/D to B/D. B/Ds who are good marketers understand they need to have unique flavors and fillings for their bakery. So, expect to find flavors of cake and/or fillings you won't find anywhere else.

If you are going to shop at a grocery store, brides told us, don't expect too much. Remember, it's a "grocery store." They don't specialize in wedding cakes. (*However, recent research shows select grocery stores are doing a better job.*) They may have 6 different brands of beans on the shelf, but probably not the same selection for your wedding cake.

If you are really serious, ask your friends, using Facebook, what cake types, fillings, and flavors they like, because choosing flavors you think your guests will like, is at best, a guessing game.

If you have decided to use multiple flavors, **ask your B/D which flavors are the most common or which ones they tend to bake the most often. Get their top 10 list.**



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *About 75% of brides choose flavors based upon their own personal preferences. They do not consider the likes or dislikes of their family, friends, or guests.*

Many brides have the mind-set this is their wedding, so they are going to have what they like. Here's the interesting part; a high percentage of brides never even get a slice of

their own wedding cake except what is smashed into their face for photos.

Consider this suggestion; make one or two tiers of flavors you really like and make the other tiers more general flavors everyone will enjoy.

Question
7-3:

Do people prefer a cake with filling or without?

Are guests expecting cakes filled with fruit or liqueur or is it okay to serve regular chocolate or yellow cake?

Traditionally, wedding cakes were pretty boring, using vanilla cake until about the year 2000. Since then, more and more brides are choosing wedding cakes with fillings and/or different flavors.

In the most recent survey (*June, 2021*) our GSBs show about 90% of orders across the nation are now including fillings and/or flavored cakes.

We have always been amazed more brides didn't want to have flavored or filled cakes 20 years ago. According to our surveys, here are some the reasons they didn't:

- 1) The mother of the bride felt it was traditional to get vanilla cake.
- 2) It cost more, so the bride's mother did not want to pay more for flavors or fillings.
- 3) Most guests expected vanilla cake, so there was no reason to get any other flavor.
- 4) Most B/Ds did not offer more than 5-10 flavors more than 15 years ago.

There is a straightforward answer as to why guests prefer flavored cakes with or without a filling. Most people are accustomed to eating a plain vanilla, yellow, marble, or chocolate cakes baked by their mother, aunt, or a co-worker. They are excited to have the chance to eat something "*different.*"

That's the key. A wedding cake made with "different" flavors of cake or filling is interesting to your guests. Almost everyone wants a slice of something unusual.

If your wedding cake is going to have a filling, make sure you order one slice per guest. Do not use the 25% less rule. (*See question 4-2.*) Here's the reason; a slice of cake made with filling is usually cut 5%-15% larger. A traditional vanilla cake that serves 150 will only serve 130 if it is filled. In addition, because it is "*different,*" more guests will probably try a slice. So, don't skimp!

Question
7-4:

Should you use certain types of frostings with certain flavors of cakes?

I am getting all lemon cake with a lemon filling. Should I be considering a certain type of frosting to best compliment the lemon cake and filling?

There is no standard answer. Your B/D has undoubtedly matched cake flavors with frostings to offer you the best flavor combinations.

If you want to deviate from their recommendations, we suggest getting a sample cake of the combination of flavors you believe would be appetizing. **Some B/Ds will allow you to choose any flavors of cake, and/or filling with any type of frosting they offer. Most B/Ds understand you are paying the bill, so it's your choice even if they do not agree.**

Please realize each B/D has recipes for their own cakes, fillings, and frostings. B/D #1 may have a wonderful combination of mocha cake filled with espresso, finished with white chocolate frosting. If you expect B/D #2 to have the same great tasting combination, you could be mistaken.

Even testing something as simple as one B/Ds lemon cake with lemon filling and buttercream frosting against another B/D could shock you. That is why you should always “taste-test” each B/D’s cakes.

Question
7-5:

I am afraid the frosting will leave an icky film of grease on the roof of my mouth or be gritty. What can I do?

How can I avoid frosting that tastes greasy or seem to have little pieces of sugar grit?

Again, you’ll have to “taste-test” the frostings from various B/Ds. If a B/D has greasy or gritty frosting...RUN!

There are only two reasons frostings taste greasy. (*When people talk about greasy frosting, they are usually referring to “American Buttercream,” which is made with shortening like Crisco.*)

First, the B/D making the frosting uses a cheap shortening that has a “high melting point.” (*Oh boy, here we go with this technical stuff.*) Let's explain the term “*melting point*.” You’ll be able to use this information for your future cooking needs.

High “melting point” fats are typical shortenings you buy at the grocery store to fry or cook with.

Low “melting point” fats are typically butter, margarines or shortenings a professional chef or baker can purchase from a food supplier.

Here’s the difference. Butter has the lowest melting point (*between 85°-95°*). Which means, when you put it in your mouth (*which is usually between 97°-99°*) it melts very quickly. So, if you make frosting with butter, it tastes great because it doesn’t have the chance to cling to the roof of your mouth.

If a B/D uses a cheap shortening to make your frosting, it tastes greasy because most shortenings have a high melting point (98°-115°), which means the fat sticks to the roof of your mouth instead of melting in your mouth.

Remember, earlier we stated the frosting would taste greasy with a “cheap shortening.” With the technological advancements in shortenings and margarines, there isn’t a good reason for a B/D to have greasy frosting. What it usually means is that the B/D is being cheap with a capital “C.”

The second reason frosting tastes greasy or tastes like it has sand in it is because the B/D is buying premixed frosting in cans or pails. Almost all commercially produced frosting uses a high-grade shortening for the fat content. But even with a low melting point shortening, it still leaves a slightly greasy taste.

As for the likeness of sand in the frosting, it’s actually granulated sugar or what you know as regular table sugar. Once again, the cause is typically a technical problem for which we will not elaborate.

Not that we are siding with the taste of less than great frosting, but there is one more important thing you need to know. The best tasting buttercreams are typically the ones with the lowest melting points, which means they are not the best frostings to use for decorating.

They are the frostings that melt the quickest in the summer or in warm reception sites. Also, you are limited in the decorations for your wedding cake because they don't have the stiffness to hold up well.

Buttercreams that use a blend of low melting point shortening and butter gives you the widest variety of options for the frosting on your cake, as well as decorating your cake.

Now that we have explained the answer to this question, just remember one simple thing. If the frosting tastes good and it can be used to decorate the design you want...go for it! Don't worry about all the rest of the stuff we used to answer this question.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *Over the course of the last 10 years, rolled fondant frosting has really picked up in popularity. B/Ds have taken the opportunity to combine rolled fondant with the European type of buttercream.*

Here's how they do it: Your wedding cake is first frosted in butter-rich buttercream and then covered with very thin rolled fondant. The fondant acts as a shell for the fragile buttercream, which serves two purposes. First, the buttercream stays more stable, like the yolk inside of an eggshell and secondly, the fondant covering gives you a multiplicity of decorating options up and above the very soft buttercream.

Question
7-6:

What's the difference in frostings? Can I use any frosting for any design?

I am planning to have a very ornate Roman type design on my wedding cake. Will the design dictate which type of frosting I can use?

Most professional B/Ds talk in terms of icings. The rest of us call icing...frosting. In this book, I use the common term "frosting" as much as possible.

Just like shrimp, hamburger or chicken, there are thousands of recipes for different types of frostings.

Trying to explain the properties of frostings and their uses becomes technical and is beyond the scope of this book. To keep it simple, most B/Ds use some form of "Buttercream," "Fondant," "Whipped Topping," "Cream Cheese," or "Boiled" icing for wedding cakes.

Instead of trying to understand the difference in frostings, **recognize the fact B/Ds are showing you cakes already designed with specific frostings for specific purposes.**

Most wedding cakes are frosted and decorated in particular frostings or "sugar-pastes." (*A frosting or decoration primarily made from some form of sugar and other ingredients.*)

Most of the time, ***it is not up to the bride to choose the frosting or sugar paste being used*** to decorate a particular wedding cake. The choice of frosting to frost and decorate your wedding cake should be left up to the expertise of the B/D. Sugar paste selection(s) is one of the primary reasons you choose and rely on a professional B/D to create your cake. They will use what is appropriate.

Question

7-7:

How do I know the frosting will taste good?

Do all Baker/Designers allow you to taste their frosting?

When you request sample cakes, get the type of frosting you'll use on your wedding cake.

Similar to the differences in the flavors of cakes and fillings between B/Ds, the same holds true for frostings. Every B/D makes their own recipe for frosting, unless they are buying it premixed.

Since buttercream frosting is still the primary frosting used on wedding cakes, you'll definitely have to sample each B/D's buttercream.

As an interesting side note, many brides told us, the #1 difference between B/Ds was the taste between their buttercream frostings.

The same goes for "rolled fondant." If you are having rolled fondant on your wedding cake, make sure you get a sampling. Once again, you'll find quite a difference between B/Ds.

Question

7-8:

What can I do to make sure the frosting isn't an inch thick on the cake?

I don't want the frosting on my cake to be an inch thick. What can I do to make sure the cake has only a thin coat of frosting?

It is unbelievable how many times brides told us there was too much frosting on their wedding cake; meaning the frosting was too thick.

When we surveyed brides, whose reception had been within the last 60 days, the fifth most common complaint was the frosting being too thick.

We must admit, this criticism stuns us. It simply does not make any sense for a B/D to put excess frosting on a cake. Yet, brides are complaining about it.

First, let's look at why a B/D **would** not put extra frosting on a wedding cake.

- *With the high cost of butter, shortening, eggs, cream cheese, and other ingredients, it is too expensive.*
- *We have never interviewed a B/D who likes to waste money.*
- *Too much frosting on a cake can cause problems, especially in hot or humid weather.*
- *It makes the cake heavier to deliver.*
- *Too much frosting unbalances the taste of the overall cake flavor.*
- *It upsets the bride.*

Second, let's look at why a B/D **would** put extra frosting on a wedding cake.

- Ahhhh.
- Hum.
- Let's think...
- Well...Oh...

THERE ARE NO REASONS!

Okay, we could think of a couple of crummy reasons. First, a B/D is trying to hide crumbs in their frosting, so they add more frosting to cover them up. Or, second, they add a lot of frosting to cover up baking mistakes, such as uneven or crooked layers of cake. In both cases, these are...crummy B/Ds.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC TIP: *If this concerns you, tell your B/D you would like to have the frosting as thin as possible without the cake showing through. If you at least tell them, they will be mindful of your request.*

Question
7-9:

Are there any frostings I should steer away from for a summer wedding?

Do some Baker/Designers use frosting that could melt and slide off my cake or is that an old wives' tale?

This is a debate between B/Ds. But, the majority agrees, you should **stay away from whip crème type frostings and buttercreams that are rich in butter content.** Both have a tendency to melt easily.

This is another area of your cake you'll have to trust the judgment of your B/D. A B/D who has been in business for three years or longer knows how well "THEIR" particular frostings hold up in any and all conditions.

It would be foolish for a B/D not to tell you the truth. They certainly do not like giving refunds.

One frosting all B/Ds agrees that holds up well in heat and moderate humidity is *"rolled fondant."*



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Typically, a B/D will ask you where the reception is being held and if the cake(s) will be set-up indoors or outdoors. As soon as you say, "outdoors" a good B/D knows their limitations for your cake(s), especially for a summer wedding in a hot climate.*

If you choose to pick-up your bride's cake and/or groom's cake, tell your B/D where your cake will be placed. The same reasons apply.

Question
7-10:

Is fondant the only way to achieve a finished smooth look on my wedding cake or can it be done with regular frosting?

Do I really have to pay the higher cost of fondant for a really smooth finish, or can a smooth finish be accomplished with a cheaper frosting that Baker/Designers don't want me to know about?

Some B/Ds will tell you they have a frosting as smooth as rolled fondant. Some of them may have something close. But, that frosting does not exist. If it did, fondant wouldn't be so popular, and everyone would be using it.

In our research, we didn't find anyone who had frosting as smooth as rolled fondant. The closest we found were whipped frostings and a few buttercreams that are very creamy and have a very smooth surface appearance. BUT... *(there always seem to be a...but)* you are very limited with the decoration.

If you want an absolutely simple cake, which is only frosted and then finished with fresh flowers, then and only then will smooth whip work. Now, take that cake and try to add a gathered swag to it or hang gum-paste roses over the sides...you can't! **Whip frostings or butter-rich buttercreams are meant for simple decorations. You cannot add any heavy or complex decorations to it.**

Here's the bottom line. There is no replacement we are aware of that replaces the perfectly smooth appearance of rolled fondant along with the diverse ability to decorate it.

Question

7-11:

Does fondant really taste gross?

Does anyone have a good tasting fondant?

This is another personal preference issue. You'll want to make sure the fondant your B/D uses tastes okay to you. We say okay, because we have never spoken with anyone who loves fondant. *(Except for the B/D who is trying to convince you to use it.)*

Many years ago, most fondants did taste terrible. However, that is not true anymore. Acceptable tasting fondants are on the market. Whereas most decent tasting fondants were imported from England, over the last few years, companies in the USA have begun to make much better tasting fondants, as well as many B/Ds who make their own.

Even with better tasting fondants on the market, we still found 75% of brides do not like the taste or feel of fondant in their mouths.

This is a very important distinction. **A vast majority of brides do not like the taste or feel in their in mouths**, yet they are willing to still use it for the sake of appearance.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *A few years ago, I went to a national Baker's convention where three companies were selling their rolled fondants. One of them had an acceptable tasting vanilla fondant, the second had a fruity tasting fondant, and the third had a marshmallow flavored fondant, which was surprisingly tasty.*

I am happy to report they did not possess the stereotypical "putty flavored" chewy fondants that most people have experienced in the past.

If you are working with an expert in rolled fondant, they will roll it very thinly and place it over a coat of buttercream. That's how a pro makes sure the rolled fondant won't be overpowering. On the other hand, someone who doesn't have the experience using rolled fondant will cover your cake with a thick layer of it. (That is whom you should probably avoid.)

Question

7-12:

I don't like the taste of fondant. Are there any other options that taste better, but look as good?

Can you suggest another frosting that will make my cake look gorgeous, but taste better?

Ah, if only that could be accomplished. But, that's not the case. As discussed in the previous two questions, some B/Ds claim they have frostings that mimic fondant and look just as good. But, in our research, we found that wasn't the case.

No one who made that claim could replicate the smooth look of rolled fondant along with the flexibility of designs that could be decorated on rolled fondant.

If you want the benefits fondant can provide for the look you desire, you'll possibly have to settle for a less than desirable taste. However, keep in mind, many B/Ds are using better tasting fondants as discussed in question 7-11.

Before you nix fondant, keep in mind, most B/Ds first cover your wedding cake with buttercream, then overlay it with fondant. It gives your guests the option to scrape fondant off their piece of cake.

What's more, we found B/Ds who are so proficient in applying thinly rolled fondant you hardly noticed the taste of it on the cake. Admittedly, you'll have to search for those skilled B/Ds.

Question
7-13:

Why is fondant so expensive?

Is it true that cakes covered and decorated in fondant frosting cost twice as much?

To begin, the price of a good fondant costs a B/D around \$4 per pound. On a typical wedding cake of 150 servings, a B/D will use about 15 lbs. This automatically increases the price of your wedding cake by between \$100-\$150. That includes the price mark-up. *(As an example, if your wedding cake cost \$600 for 150 servings, adding \$150 in fondant would increase the price by \$1 per slice or 33 %.)*

If your B/D makes their own fondant, it is probably costing them in the neighborhood of \$3 per pound. That includes the labor to make it.

The biggest reason rolled a fondant wedding cake costs more has to do with the time it takes to cover the cake with rolled fondant, the additional labor hours to create fondant decorations, and the advanced skill sets required to do a great job.

Just as there is a difference in skilled plastic surgeons, there is a difference in skilled B/Ds. **You are paying for the increased skill sets of a B/D who can work proficiently with rolled fondant.**

A B/D's displays, or photos will be reflective of those skill sets. You'll have to compare work of one B/D against the work of another B/D.

To summarize the answer: you are paying for a substantial hike in the cost of ingredients, coupled with the extra time to overlay and then decorate a fondant covered cake. Then, throw in the increased skill it takes to make many of the elegant and classy looking designs you see in magazines or on the Internet.

It adds up to a cake that begins at 30% higher price and may increase the price to 200% or more than the price of a buttercream decorated cake.

GROOMS CAKES



Eye-Opening Topic 8 — Groom's Cakes

Is Having a Groom's Cake a Waste of Money or a Nice Way to Show the Groom, "He's the Man?"

Groom's cakes, like wedding cakes, have evolved over the last 20 years. Once, wedding cakes were traditionally vanilla in flavor and groom's cakes were traditionally chocolate. Once, wedding cakes were traditionally round in shape and separated by pillars and groom's cakes were traditionally sheet cakes.

"But this ain't your grandpa's groom's cake...anymore!" Many of today's groom's cakes have evolved into an entertaining piece of artwork for all the wedding guests to enjoy, not just the groom.

While a groom's cake is hardly mandatory, it does offer a fun and interesting way to spice up the cake table.

Question

8-1:

What is a groom's cake?

Can you explain to me what the cake is that sits beside the wedding cake?

We're going to *"pass"* on giving you the history of the groom's cake. If you are interested, you can find plenty of articles on bridal websites that provide *"surface-level"* information.

Just as the rest of this book is choked full of relevant, hard-hitting, and up to date facts, we're going to give you the contemporary answer about groom's cakes according to responses from our *"July 2021 survey."*

The groom's cake is complementary to the wedding cake usually slanted toward interests of the groom. We say, "usually slanted" because there are times it is a chocolate cake in either a round, tiered, or sheet cake with chocolate decorations, chocolate dipped strawberries, or a little decoration on each piece of cake, which does not reflect any interest of the groom. (*Unless he's a die-hard chocolate lover.*)

The contemporary groom's cake will capture his interest in hobbies such as his favorite sports teams, golfing, fishing, boating, baseball, NASCAR, or a casino theme. It could incorporate his job, special interests such as volunteer work, something whimsical like being a Star Trek fan, or a reflection of the couple's honeymoon destination.

Except for formal groom's cakes, you can throw out any guidelines. Basically, anything goes.

Groom's cakes come in all the same shapes, sizes, and flavors just like bride's cakes. But that's where the similarity ends.

Unlike the bride's cake, groom's cakes have the artistic freedom to include anything and everything you can think of made out of cake. For example, in the last five years, 3-Demensional groom's cakes have steadily increased in popularity, as well as cheesecakes or other dessert items, replacing sheet cakes.

Our surveys returned some incredible feedback that included 3-Demensional groom's cakes in the shapes of motorcycles, cars, boats, fish, tennis racquets, local country club clubhouses, golf balls, football and baseball stadiums, ski mountains, race car tracks, tropical islands, sports helmets, guns, different kinds of food, dogs and several other animals, pianos, guitars and other musical instruments, and many different occupations.

The brides' overwhelming message to you is to have as much fun with your groom's cake as possible.

Question
8-2:

Should I have a groom's cake?

Isn't buying a groom's cake just a clever trick to make me feel sorry for my fiancée, while getting me to spend more money?

Yes, you should have a groom's cake. In an unusual twist, that's the consensus of brides that did not have one, but now regret it. When we asked them why they didn't get one, 88% of the responses were as follows:

- 1) I felt we were already spending enough on the wedding cake.
- 2) Since only a limited number of couples get a groom's cake, what's the point? No one will miss it or expect it.
- 3) He (The groom) doesn't know the difference, so why get one.
- 4) I didn't think it was necessary.
- 5) We already had enough cake.

Putting aside the brides who regretted not getting a groom's cake, it appears the above five reasons are timeless since the percentage of brides who purchase a groom's cake has stayed in a fairly consistent range. Currently it is 27%.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: *While the major bridal websites say groom’s cakes are making a comeback, our research reveals something different. Over the course of the last 17 years (2004-2021) the percentage of brides ordering a groom’s cake has remained in the same range of between 14%-35%.*

Getting a groom’s cake is certainly not a trick to get you to spend more money. Although we must admit, “*guilt*” does work as a selling tactic. Nevertheless, we couldn’t find any B/Ds using the “*guilt-card*” to extort orders from brides. Actually, we found quite the opposite. The B/Ds we spoke with do not try to shove the sale of groom’s cakes down anyone’s throat. Moreover, it’s as if they don’t even try at all. We were so astounded by this, we had to know why.

We finally figured it out. **Most brides already have their minds made up not to get a groom’s cake before they ever shop for the bride’s cake.**

Listen, we can’t tell you if you should or should not have one. It’s a personal choice, just like everything you are choosing for your wedding. But if you decide to have one, figure out if you want one by choosing (a) a “*traditional*” style, (b) a moderately decorated “*interesting*” style, or (c) one that “*blows the doors off the place*” style.

After you pick your preference, get on the Internet for some ideas. Take them to your B/D and see which one(s) they can make or choose one they have made before that captures your interest.

The majority of brides we interviewed were delighted with their decision to get one. Some of the most gratifying phone calls we receive are from brides telling us how many great complements they received from their attention-grabbing groom’s cake.

When you take a look at some of the clever ideas on the web, you have to admit there are some pretty cool ones out there. Besides, whoever had enough chocolate cake?

Question
8-3:

How many couples get a groom’s cake?

I have never been to a reception where there was a groom’s cake. What percentage of couples actually gets one?

Currently, around 27% of couples are ordering one. This is from approximately 8,658 wedding cakes our “Gold Standard Wedding Cake Bakers” sold from August 2019 through May 2021.

Groom’s cakes by region seem to be most popular in the South and Midwest.

Question
8-4:

What flavors of cake do you usually choose for a groom’s cake?

I have heard groom’s cakes are always chocolate. Is that right?

The tradition of eating chocolate cake for a groom’s cake hasn’t changed much in 40 years. In our survey to our “Gold Standard” bakers, they reported the most common flavor over the course of the previous 12-month period, once again, was some form of chocolate. Either plain chocolate cake, chocolate cake with chocolate mousse filling, chocolate cake with a cappuccino filling, raspberry filling, cherry filling, and liqueur fillings such as Irish Crème or Kahlua.

Although other flavors of cakes were reported, almost 75% stated some form of chocolate cake was used.

Do not bother looking for a guideline to choose a groom's cake flavor. It doesn't exist. You are free to select any flavor the B/D is willing to make.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *As an interesting note, around 70% of brides who bought a groom's cake, did not have any chocolate cake in the bride's cake.*

Question
8-5:

Are groom's cakes usually sheet, round, or shaped cakes?
Aren't groom's cakes usually round?

Most groom's cakes were sheet cakes from about 1970-2000. In the last 20 years groom's cakes have evolved into 60% tiered and shaped cakes.

Shaped groom's cakes, such as a favorite car, airplane, musical instrument, boat, or sports items has grown steadily over the course of the last 12 years from 5% to 35%.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *On average, the price of a sheet cake costs about 15% to 20% of a tiered cake. When comparing a shaped cake to a sheet cake, you will pay about 4-6 times as much. When it comes to the "coolness factor" there is no debate. If you can afford a shaped cake, go for it. **Shaped groom's cakes are becoming as memorable as the wedding cake itself.***

Question
8-6:

How do you decide on the size of a groom's cake?
If I get a groom's cake, how big should it be in comparison to the wedding cake?

This question raises an important topic for you to think about. It is called "**Size Perspective**" (SP).

If you decide to have a groom's cake, you do not want it overpowering the bride's cake if both the bride's and groom's cake are on the same table. (*Overpowering means your attention (eye) is drawn to the groom's cake instead of the bride's cake or your eye wonders back and forth between the bride's cake and groom's cake.*)

Overpowering the wedding cake can be caused by either a dramatic difference in color and/or shape between the groom's cake and bride's cake or it can be caused by the groom's cake being too large in comparison to the bride's cake.

Understanding the correct "*size perspective*" (SP) will enable you to have a groom's cake that is neutral in size on the wedding cake table instead of overpowering the bride's cake.

Okay, we're finished lecturing for now. We had to explain SP to you before we could answer the question.

Generally, your groom's cake (*layered, tiered, or shaped*) should **not** be any larger than 25% of the size of the bride's cake. For example, if your bride's cake is 160 servings, the groom's cake should not exceed 40 servings.

There are two exceptions to this rule:

- First, if you have separate tables for the bride's and groom's cakes. Then, you can have a groom's cake as large as the bride's cake, but not larger.
- Second, if you use sheet cakes. Under most circumstances, you can set out sheet cakes up to one and a half (150%) times the size of the bride's cake and still be within your SP boundaries.

One other point, SP can also work the other way. If your groom's cake is too small, it will look out of perspective in relationship to the bride's cake.

It has been stated, **if the groom's cake is too small, it can look like an afterthought that was just thrown on the table.**

Question
8-7:

Does the groom's cake have to match or be similar in design to the wedding cake?

Should the groom's cake be decorated with a design that complements the wedding cake?

Not in most settings. As stated before, *the exception is for very formal weddings.* If everything in the wedding and reception is principally formal, so should the groom's cake. Otherwise, it will stick out like a red-nosed clown.

This is not to say you shouldn't match or complement the bride's cake. If that trips your trigger, do it. Matching and complementing the bride's cake was very popular until 10+ years ago before people were sharing groom's cake ideas on the Internet.

The bottom line is, most of the time a groom's cake should be fun. Come up with something crazy and make your reception memorable. After all, memories are all you'll have. (*That is, besides the gigantic bill from the reception.*)

Question
8-8:

How does the price of a groom's cake compare to a wedding cake?

How much should I spend on a groom's cake in comparison to the wedding cake?

When the GSBs were surveyed, many told us 15% of the time the groom's cake was pricier than the wedding cake.

Typically, the groom's cake is simpler in design and requires less skill and time to decorate. The combination of these factors usually makes the price less.

The statistic we can pass along is the amount of money usually spent on a groom's cake in comparison to the wedding cake. **Our surveyed GSBs reported 90% of brides who order groom's cakes spend an average of between 15%-40% of the amount spent on the bride's cake.** I caution you not to automatically think it will cost 75% less than the bride's cake. Look at the price ratios in question 8-5.



Eye-Opening Secret 9 — Delivery

Nothing Ruins Your Reception Like a Cake That Doesn't Show Up on Time or Worse...Not at All. (Use our sure-fire proven methods to receive your wedding cake on-time and in one piece.)

If the delivery of your wedding cake is one of your biggest concerns, you are not alone. **The thought of your cake being late or not showing up at all ranks 3rd as the biggest worry among brides for fourteen straight years (Aug '07-July '21).**

If you use the advice taken from this chapter, your chances of winning the lottery will be greater than receiving a smashed cake, one that is late, or worst of all, one that never shows up.

If you need or want to pick up and deliver your own wedding cake, we have included techniques to help you get the cake to where it needs to go, so it doesn't fall apart, fade in color, or melt.

Question
9-1:

Is it better to have someone pick up my cake or should I have it delivered?
How hard can it be to pick up a wedding cake? After all, I'll save \$50.

Most of the time it is better, let's say it again, w-a-y better to have your cake delivered by someone who knows what they are doing (*usually a B/D or someone who delivers wedding cakes for the B/D*) and has done it a hundred times before.

Brides told us **the extra money you'll save picking it up it isn't worth the stress or aggravation to wonder if everything will go alright.**

Here's the important point you need to grasp; the minute a family member or a helpful friend walks out the cake shop with your wedding cake; the cake becomes your responsibility!

If they drop the cake, smash a side, stick their finger in it, get it rained on, watch it become a flying object as they swerve to avoid another car, have a cat or dog jump on it or lick it, have a squirrel jump in their mini-van to grab a hunk of cake, have a swarm of flies or a myriad of other flying insects decide, "it's dinner-time"...it's your problem.

Here is a typical horror story about designating a trusted friend to pick up the cake. *"I had my good friends Ashley and Deric pick up the cake and bring it to the reception site. Then, I received a call from my caterer stating, 'I don't know who dropped off the cake, but one whole side is sort of squished. What do you want me to do?'"*

Of course, Ashley says she didn't know there was anything wrong. **Needless to say... it cost a lot more to pick up than have it delivered.**



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *There are a fair number of B/Ds have encountered the problem described in the "wedding cake pick-up" story many times over. To overcome this issue, they no longer allow anyone to pick up their wedding cake. They simply deliver (the exception is for very small cake) them all. If your baker doesn't allow you to pick yours up, you now know the reason.*

Question
9-2:

What delivery options do most Baker/Designers give you?
Do I get to choose when I want it delivered?

We found delivery options can vary quite a bit. Ask every B/D for their delivery procedures.

Taking this into account, here are some basic guidelines all B/D's follow:

- A B/D should deliver and set-up your cake at a time that makes sense. (*Notice we didn't say at a time you prefer.*)
- Your cake should usually be delivered at least 3 hours before your reception begins. Some consideration should be taken for how far your reception is from the B/D's store. Why 3 hours? If something happens to your cake, 3 hours is typically the shortest amount of time it takes to make repairs. Keep in mind, your primary mindset about your delivery isn't just about the cake getting to the reception, it needs to be the prevention of a potential problem.
- Your B/D should be in touch with your caterer, if you are using one, or the reception site to double check what time the room will be set-up.
- If you are using fresh flowers on your wedding cake and your florist is handling the arrangement and placement of the flowers, we advise you contact your florist and let them know when the cake will arrive. If you are paying your florist to place fresh flowers on the cake, make sure they don't drop off the flowers early and just leave them for someone else to place on your cake.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *Not to speak ill of caterers or managers of reception sites, but they do cause grief for B/Ds. The majority of the time it's because they are not at the reception site at the agreed time to accept the delivery or the cake table has not been set-up for the placement of the cake. In either case, the B/D might need to come back. (Those are two reasons your cake could arrive late.)*

The topic of delivery disasters is one of monumental proportions. As B/Ds we can laugh about the various problems we have encountered over the years. If you only knew of the circumstances we have faced, it would make your toes curl. The cool part is that most of the time the bride never knows or finds out what it took to get their wedding cake delivered.

Even though B/Ds have obstacles beyond their control for the delivery of your cake, you should expect them to work through any and all problems.

Question
9-3:

If I am thinking about picking up my cake instead of having it delivered, what should I know to help me make a decision?

Really, is it ever a good idea to pick up your wedding cake?

Why you would pick up your wedding cake will be answered first.

Here are three of the most common justifications:

- *Your reception facility is 100 miles away. Your B/D doesn't delivery that far.*
- *It's only a 35 serving cake (manageable for you to pick up) and you want to save the delivery charge.*
- *You love the work of a certain B/D, and they are willing to make your cake, but they are too busy to deliver it.*

A wedding cake can be easier to pick up and drop off, if you follow some simple guidelines:

- Pick up the cake in a vehicle that has a flat surface area for the cake or the cake boxes, like a van or SUV.
- Buy some 1/4" to 1" foam rubber to place on the floor and place the cake or boxes on the foam rubber. The foam acts as a shock absorber to cushion the ride and it will help prevent the cake from sliding.
- Cover the windows where possible with newspaper to prevent the sunlight from shining on the cake.
- Drive as though you have a fishbowl full of water right beside you. In other words, drive slowly and cautiously. (*Don't worry about people honking, making faces, or giving you rude hand gestures.*)

Your primary problems will be chuckholes, slippery road surfaces, other drivers, sudden stops, the sun, and heat.

Don't do these things:

- Try to pick-up your wedding cake in a small car.
- Pick-up your cake, using the back of a pick-up, (*Don't laugh, someone actually did it.*)

- Place it in the back of a SUV with uneven cargo space. (*Leaning tiered cakes have a tendency to start falling apart— very quickly.*)
- Bring a dog or cat.
- Leave the windows down.
- Take corners too fast.
- Stop too fast or take off too fast.
- Smoke.
- Bring young children. (*They like to poke things.*)

Let's take a minute and elaborate on the use of your front and back seats and your trunk.

FRONT SEAT:

Most front and rear seats angle backwards; normally bad choices to place a wedding cake. An angled seat causes the cake to slide, tip over, or shift the upper tiers. All of those could severely damage your cake. That is, if it doesn't fall apart!

If you are in a pickle and don't have another choice for a vehicle besides a two-door or four-door car, go ahead and place the cake on the front passenger seat.

- *Make sure the cake is in a box.*
- *Bring along some bath towels to prop up the backside of the cake box so you can level it.*
- *Then drive with one hand on the steering wheel while the other is gripping the box to make sure it doesn't fly off the front seat.*

Your alternative is to bring someone with you and place the cake box on their lap. Then, you can drive with two hands on the steering wheel and your passenger can be the shock absorber and restraining device.

BACK SEAT:

If you need to use your back seat, basically follow the same instructions as the front seat. Except, put something on both sides of the box to hold it in place. Where the front edge of the seat and box meet, we suggest putting some double-sided tape to keep the box from sliding off the front side of the seat.

TRUNK:

Do not attempt to put a wedding cake in a dirty trunk. If you do, expect to have dust, hair, or other thing-ee's stuck on the frosting. Unless you like gritty frosting, we highly suggest you vacuum your trunk first. (*Let me back up a second. First, take out all the junk in your trunk; then vacuum it.*)

Now that your trunk is clean:

- Place some non-slip type material on the existing carpet. (*Usually, the carpet in your trunk is made from material so slippery, you'll think your wedding cake is on an ice-skating rink.*)
- Then, place some foam rubber, pile type carpeting, towels, skid proof rug, or scotch-type tape under the cake or cake box. Those types of materials will keep the cake from moving.
- Keep the cake as straight as possible while you are loading it into the trunk.
- Gently close the trunk. Slamming the trunk shut could cause dirt particles to come loose and land on the cake.
- Then drive straight to your destination. (*Do not, again DO NOT stop at the grocery store, go to a movie, stop over a friend's house, or stop to get a bite to eat.*)

Here's why. **The greenhouse effect from the sun is very pronounced in your trunk. We have measured temperatures of 125 degrees on a sunny 85-degree day.** *(That is hot enough to melt any wedding cake into a cake casserole you can scoop out of your trunk in about one hour.)*

How fast your cake begins to melt primarily depends on whether the cake has been refrigerated prior to you picking it up. Just make sure your B/D places the cake in their cooler or refrigerator for at least 6 hours before you arrive. If it has been refrigerated, the cake should have an internal temperature of between 38°- 42° degrees.

That gives you between 30 minutes to 1 hour to get where you need to go depending on weather conditions.

If you need to travel over one hour with the cake in the trunk on a warm or hot day, don't do it! Either drive with the cake inside the vehicle, purchase your wedding cake from a B/D that will deliver over an hour away, or purchase your cake somewhere closer to the reception.

Take the cake out of the trunk by reaching under the cake or cake box as far as your hands will go. Ideally, you want to have your hands under the center of the cake while you are lifting it out.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Having a stacked wedding cake is today's popular trend. A stacked cake means the tiers are all placed on top of each other instead of using individual tier separators.*

However, to be the safest and travel the farthest with a wedding cake, consider bucking the trend and ordering a wedding cake design that separates each tier from one another. Individual tiers do not carry the excess weight of stacked tiers, which are the cause of most delivery problems. Individual tiers can then be put together upon reaching your destination.

Question
9-4:

Aren't most wedding cakes delivered and set-up free of charge?

Isn't the delivery and set-up of the cake automatically built into the price of the cake(s)?

First of all, we have never interviewed a B/D who refused to deliver a wedding cake, except for reception sites that are far away. For some B/Ds, anything over 30 miles is too far, others 50 miles, others 100 miles, and finally there are B/Ds that will deliver anywhere...for a fair price.

We even found a couple B/Ds who ship wedding cakes anywhere in the country using FedEx.

As far as getting the cake delivered for free, maybe that was the case in the past, but due to the devastation Covid has caused, gas is higher, labor is up 20%, as well as a bakers' ingredient costs. If a baker says it's included with the price of the cake, they've probably added \$25-\$75 to the overall price.

The majority of B/Ds we found who offer both delivery and pick up of wedding cakes will itemize the delivery fee separately on your order. That way the option of delivery or pick-up is available.

The set-up of your cake is always included with the delivery. As a general practice, we didn't find one single case of a B/D refusing to set up the cake or expected the caterer or someone else to set it up.

Notice we said as a general practice. There are situations where the caterer or manager will gladly set-up the cake. Let me give you four of many possible circumstances:

- *First, you are serving cheesecake. A cheesecake needs to be kept refrigerated and it shouldn't set out for more than one hour. Otherwise, it could turn mushy. It wouldn't be practical or advisable for a B/D to show up 15 minutes before your reception in order to set-up your cheesecake.*
- *Second, a hotel, restaurant, or country club will place the wedding cake in their walk-in cooler and set it up after they conclude an earlier function they are holding in the room where the cake will be placed.*
- *Third, the cake is delivered at the requested time, but for some reason the room is not set-up for the cake.*
- *Fourth, as a fun gesture, the cake will be rolled out from the kitchen into the room, for all guests to witness at a later time.*

In these cases, the caterer or event site manager “sets-up” the cake.



“PERSONAL-MANIAC” TIP: 98% of the time your B/D sets-up the cake. Most B/Ds wouldn't think of having anyone else touch your cake unless it's necessary.

Question
9-5:

Where in the room should the cake be set-up?

Does it matter where in the reception room the cake is placed?

In most cases, your B/D has no control whatsoever over the placement of the cake table. The caterer or banquet manager gives you layout choices for all your tables, including the cake table. Since they have the experience in layout and setup for their own facility, you should be able to trust them.

In the event you are having a reception in your home, outside in a tent, or other venues that are outside of a typical reception area, we've listed some important points for you to take into account.

Here's the first and foremost rule; if your cake has any colored frosting on it, **keep it away from any window!** Having any sort of outside light shine directly on cake with any colored decoration is a critical mistake. The UV rays from the sun (*even on a hazy or cloudy day*) will bleach any colored frosting on your cake, sometimes in just a few short minutes.

Many times, the glass from the window acts as a magnifying glass increasing the temperature of the frosting, resulting in what will be a melting and expensive bad memory.

Do not set up the cake table near a high traffic area. For some unknown reason, fragile items, like a wedding cake, seem to fall under “Murphy's Law.” (*You know, the law that says, “If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong.”*) Here's what happens. Guests unintentionally bump the table, stick their finger in the cake, spill food or beverage items on or near the cake, or hit the cake with a purse, present, or any item they are carrying. We even spoke with a woman who said a couple was goofing around, tripped, and fell onto the cake table with everything including the cake crashing to the floor.

If your reception is in an old house, outside in a tent, in a barn, in the forest, or an old historic building **make sure the table is absolutely level**. Get a carpenter's level to help you. If you don't, expect your cake to lean like the "*Leaning Tower of Pisa*."

Question
9-6:

How far are most B/Ds willing to deliver and how much do they charge?

My reception is 2 hours from your bakery. Are you willing to deliver that far and how do you calculate your delivery fee?

Let's begin with the last half of the question first. We discovered three different pricing structures:

- *First, are the B/Ds who include the delivery fee within the pricing structure of the wedding cake.*
- *Second, there are B/Ds who charge a flat fee. The B/Ds we surveyed charge between \$25 and \$75 within a radius of 20-30 miles.*
- *Third, are B/Ds who charge by the mile. Our surveyed B/Ds gave us a price range of \$.50-\$1.50 per mile round trip.*

Some B/Ds in larger cities stated it wasn't just the distance, but the time it typically took to drive a particular location. This would be true for cities with heavy traffic and large geographic distances, such as New York City, LA, Dallas, Atlanta, Boston, and Chicago. Be prepared to pay even higher fees in large cities with excessive amounts of traffic.

If you live in a small town or in a rural area, you should also expect to pay increased delivery fees. This is especially the case if you want to use the services of a B/D from another town or city who is over 20 miles away.

The distance a particular B/D is willing to deliver usually depends on which of the four types of B/Ds you choose. **Our research discovered retail bakeries and specialty cake boutiques are the most likely to deliver the furthest.** Home decorators finished third and grocery stores are the most unlikely unless they are also doing your catering.

In all instances, B/Ds were willing to deliver up to 30 miles away. When asked if they deliver at a distance of between 30-50 miles, approximately 65% of B/Ds responded affirmatively. When the distance was raised to between 50-75 miles, the number drops to 35%. Finally, when asked if they delivered over 100 miles, only 12% said they do.



PRICELESS ADVICE: *Although these statistics are helpful if your wedding cake is delivered within 30 miles, after 30 miles it's a toss-up. If you want to hire a "great" B/D who is more than 30 miles away, ask up front if they are willing to deliver to your reception site.*

Question
9-7:

What other services do most Baker/Designers provide in addition to the cake delivery, like setting up the cake or cake cutting?

Do you only deliver the wedding cake, or do you provide any other services?

Most B/Ds are in the business to create wedding cakes. Delivering and setting up the wedding cake is considered part of the service you receive.

Other services such as staying to cut and serve the cake are the exception. Our surveys resulted with less than 10% of B/Ds who offer a cake cutting service. Almost the entire 10% were made up of very small B/Ds who only made one wedding cake per weekend.

Two common services we discovered were floral services and limited catering. The B/Ds who offered floral services had a floral designer on staff for their wedding cakes. They typically offered complete wedding floral services as well.

The B/Ds who offered catering services were B/Ds who served breakfast and lunch in their bakeries. Grocery stores seemed to offer the most added services. They are eager to sell you a complete package for the wedding cake, flowers, and catering.

Here's a word of advice. Just remember what type of B/D will serve you best. If you are on a tight budget, using a grocery store to provide many functions of your reception is a great idea. On the other hand, if you are looking for a better-quality cake, you don't want someone who offers a lot of extras.

They should be focusing on your wedding cake, not selling video services and make-up supplies.

Look in the appendix section under “Questions A Baker Might Ask, They Don’t Teach at Harvard” for additional services.

Question 9-8:	How can I make sure the cake is delivered on time or even shows up? Is there something I can do to make sure the cake shows up on time?
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We have been asked this question so many times, it's mind-boggling. Since this subject is so important for most brides, we spent a considerable amount of time seeking and testing the best preventive measures. Here they are:

- Begin by getting the cell phone number of the person responsible for delivering the cake. Not the owner, the manager, or the dishwasher's phone number. (Unless one of them is delivering your cake.) You want the cell phone of the actual person delivering the cake.
- Designate someone from your party as a “*contact person*,” to be in charge of accepting the cake. Give them the B/Ds phone number and the phone number of the person delivering the cake. Then have your “*contact person*” follow through with one of the following:
 - › Meet the delivery driver of your cake at the reception or have your “*contact person*” go the reception site shortly after the arranged time of delivery to make sure it arrived or
 - › Give the phone number of your “*contact person*” to the caterer, wedding planner, or whoever is in charge of the reception site. Tell them you would appreciate a call to your “*contact person*” after the cake arrives or
 - › **Have your B/D call your “contact person” as soon as the cake has been delivered and set up to let them know everything went fine. (This is my personal favorite.)**

If for some reason the person who is supposed to call your “*contact person*” doesn't call, make sure your “*contact person*” calls them.

Question
9-9:

How far in advance can the cake be set-up without worrying about it leaning, falling over or something else happening to it?

Does it make a difference what time the cake is set-up?

This question requires more information to receive an answer. There are many variables before a proper answer can be given.

For example, it depends on what type of cake it is, what kind of frosting is on the cake, what kinds of fillings are in the cake, how it is set-up, what the decorations are made of, how heavy the decorations are, how hot or sunny the reception area is, whether it is outdoors or indoors...and on and on.

In general, if your reception is indoors, around 3 to 8 hours. For an outside reception, 30 minutes to 1 hour.

With that said, it may also be alright to set it up 12 hours in advance or no more than 1 hour. An experienced B/D knows how long any of his or her cakes can safely sit out at room temperature. The key is, make sure you ask.

Question
9-10:

What do I do if the cake is delivered damaged and they just leave it?

I heard from a friend, "the baker just left the cake knowing it was damaged." Should I worry about this happening to me? What can I do?

If you follow through with the suggestion in question 9-8, you shouldn't have a problem.

Nevertheless, if you are worried about this happening to you, get a written guarantee to protect yourself.

We know...a written guarantee doesn't fix your cake, but you have to face reality. If your cake is ruined and you don't have a written guarantee, now you have two problems. First, you'll still have a cake no one is coming to fix and second, you could be out hundreds or thousands of dollars. With a guarantee, at least you're in a position to recover some or all the cost of the cake.

We interviewed brides who had problems with their B/Ds and wound up in small claims court. Guess what, barely half of them won! That's right, it seems you only have a 50-50 chance to win. Why such lousy odds? According to one judge, "*You don't have a written guarantee.*"

Obviously, courts have a much easier time with signed agreements that spell out terms and conditions than "*he said—she said.*" And that doesn't even include the amount of time and aggravation you go through trying to set things right.

Just to be clear, I am not offering legal advice, I am offering my personal opinion for helping overcome your fear for receiving your cake late or not at all.



OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZ: *I advise B/Ds to take 3-4 photos of each wedding cake at different angles after it is finished being set up at the reception site. The photos help prove the cake was in good shape when they left the building. For example, sometimes B/Ds were being accused of the decoration being smashed,*

the cake having the wrong color on it, the topper fell off, the cake was the wrong size, it was not the correct decoration, among other things.

However, many times, damage is not caused by the B/D, rather, it is caused by a reception staff member, an employee of the caterer, the florist, an overzealous guest showing up early to the reception, or a complete stranger.

Now, if the problem was caused by the baker, it should be easily shown to be true. If it wasn't, that too will be easy to identify.

(You are probably wondering why the judges in those cases sided with the B/D when the wedding cake was obviously damaged or completely ruined? Answer: The brides couldn't prove the B/Ds caused the damage. In every case, the bride had to admit other people were in the room who could have caused the damage after the B/D had left the facility and before the reception began.)

This is an area where most grocery stores have an advantage. They may not have the staff to come out and fix the cake, but they are usually very honest and good at fulfilling financial obligations. If your cake is messed up, most of them will reimburse a portion of your money or all your money without hesitation. They do not want to lose you as a customer for the future purchase of groceries or to bad-mouth their store.

We found retail bakeries and specialty cake shops to be somewhat more reluctant to give refunds. They have a tendency to negotiate a lower refund than most grocery stores, but still be fair.

According to brides, if you are going to end up in court, it is most likely with a "Home Baker." Our research uncovered the reason is Home Bakers typically have the least business acumen. That's not to say all Home Bakers, because most are awesome, but unfortunately, more than bakers who have bricks and mortar locations.



PERSONAL-MANIAC TIP: *If a B/D has a written guarantee, they are less likely to leave your cake in a damaged condition. They know there will be consequences to pay. In addition, just the fact a B/D has a written guarantee demonstrates their willingness to be honest, caring, conscientious, organized, and responsive.*

Hum-m-m...those are the exact "positive traits" your B/D should possess as discussed in the very first topic on qualifying a B/D.

As a side note, when you purchase products or services from an individual or a small company that offers a written guarantee, remember the positive traits they are exhibiting.

Here's the kicker. Most small business owners don't even know why a guarantee is s-o-o-o important.

They only think it works to take away the risk from a customer. What they are missing is the huge benefit and advantage of how it qualifies them as honest, caring, conscientious, organized, and responsive.

Question 9-11:	What happens if the cake is completely ruined during delivery? What can I expect the Baker/Designer to do for me if the cake is ruined during or upon delivery?
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According to our research, there is a cake incident once every 94 deliveries. A delivery incident means any type of damage to a cake that needs repair.

The complete loss of a wedding cake only happens at a rate of approximately 1 in 850 cakes. That means you can feel very safe. But just in case your cake is that 1 in 94, or 1 in 850, it would be prudent to have a backup plan.

As part of your decision to hire a B/D, consider hiring someone that has the ability to repair or replace your wedding cake within the 3-hour window discussed in question 9-2.

Typically, you'll need to hire a larger B/D, one that has enough staff to immediately send someone to fix the problem or has the staff to immediately begin work on a replacement cake. Otherwise, you must be willing to assume some risk.

If you decide to take the risk of working with a smaller B/D or a B/D who admits they cannot repair or replace your cake in 3 hours or less, take this precautionary measure; ***contact other B/Ds in your area to find out who does short notice emergency cakes.***

In the event of an emergency, be prepared to settle for sheet cakes, or odd sizes of cakes and flavors. Having something to serve your guests is better than nothing at all. Besides, your guests don't know what your wedding cake was supposed to look like, so many of them wouldn't know the difference.

When it comes to B/Ds refunding the price of your cake, we found about 46% of them are willing to reimburse the entire price of the cake, but no more. The other 54% said they would give all your money back plus a reasonable amount for you to cover the expense of getting an emergency cake elsewhere, up to one dollar per guest. *(Around \$100 to replace a 100 serving wedding cake.)*

Question 9-12:	Do Baker/Designers provide for the pick-up of any stands, plates, fountains, etc. after the reception or do I have to arrange for someone to return those items to the store? Do most Baker/Designers pick up their own cake hardware or is the customer expected to return them?
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Typically, all rental items or articles that have a deposit on them should be returned to the B/D as soon as possible. Think of returning your cake items like you do items from a rental store or tuxedo shop.

Items are expected to be returned within a day or two. Most of the time, the agreement with your B/D will state when your deposit items need to be returned. Also, pay attention to any late fees or penalties if you do not return them in a timely fashion.

Most surveyed B/Ds *(75% of them)* stated they would pick up deposit items...for a fee. But it is not a common practice.

If you are thinking about having your B/D pick up the returnable deposit items for you, inquire what the cost will be prior to placing your order, so there isn't any misunderstanding. If your reception site is a considerable drive, expect to pay a premium for this service.

According to our findings, the most common request for the pick-up of returnable deposit items are from brides who purchase cakes above \$2,000.

Question
9-13:

Am I supposed to tip the person who delivers and sets-up the cake?

Is it customary to tip the delivery person who sets up the cake? If it is, how much should I tip them?

The B/Ds we surveyed are all for tipping. They thought we should include this in the book as proper etiquette. The reality is, 98% of the time, no one tips. It is not expected, but when it happens, it brings a huge smile to our faces.

If it makes you feel good showing some added appreciation, by all means, have someone at the reception hall hand the delivery person an envelope with a tip, include it with your final payment, or mail a little something to the bakery in the name of the delivery driver.

Although you might have read advice about tipping wedding cake delivery drivers on the web, the fact is, it's not a common practice.

When this question was posed to our "Gold Standard Wedding Cake Bakers," (prior to Covid) none of us could think of more than a handful of times we received a tip out of delivering hundreds if not thousands of wedding cakes.

(Interestingly, due to Covid and the changing dynamics in the marketplace, 2021, saw an uptick in tipping and 2022 appears as if it's going to be strong as well. Bakers are reporting around 1 in 10 brides are now adding a tip to their order or offering one upon delivery.)

When we do receive a tip, it is usually \$100-\$200. Alright...\$10-\$20.

Secret

#1

Many times, the person taking your order isn't the one who bakes, designs, and decorates your cake.

Is the person taking my order the one that bakes and designs my cake?

We discovered a good number of brides automatically assume the person taking their order is the person who will be decorating their cake. However, there are times that is not the case.

We also discovered B/Ds who train their salespeople so thoroughly, the brides actually believe the salesperson personally bakes and decorates their wedding cake. While we applaud these B/Ds for having well trained salespeople, it's not very cool for crossing a boundary of deception.

The truth is the person who takes your order typically is determined by the size of the B/D. Many times, it is a salesperson, not a decorator.

If you use a person working from their home or a small shop, you're probably speaking with the person who does everything from start to finish. When you are working with a larger B/D, they may send out a decorator to speak with you who designs wedding cakes, or they may send a trained salesperson to take your wedding cake order.

Note this key point. It doesn't matter who takes your order as long as they are qualified to do so. You don't want your order taken by a bubble gum chewing teenager who can't spell decorator (*oops, I mean decorator*) or Bruno the dishwasher.

Whether you are working directly with a decorator or a salesperson, make sure you get the name of the person who took your order. If you need to make any changes, make sure you always speak with the same person.

Don't make the mistake of calling back three times with changes or adjustments to your order and speaking with three different people. That is a recipe for disaster.

Here's the bottom line. It doesn't matter who takes your order or decorates your cake as long as they are competent.

Secret

#2

Be aware of the "size game." Just because you price a wedding cake at Smith's Bakery for 200 servings doesn't mean you are going to get the same size cake at Susan's Cake Boutique.

Don't all bakeries use the same size of tiers for 200 servings?

The truth: There is no industry standard when it comes to matching the total servings of a cake to the sizes of the tiers you'll receive.

For example,

- Smith's Bakery (B/D #1) says you'll receive four round tiers of 16", 12", 8", and 6" for 200 hundred servings.

- Susan's Confectionery Shop (B/D #2) says you'll receive four round tiers 18", 12", 9", and 6" for 200 hundred servings.
- Candy's Cake Cottage (B/D #3) says you'll receive a five round tiers of 16", 14", 10", 8", and 6" for 200 hundred servings.

So, who is giving you the most cake for your money?

You probably answered it's a no-brainer; it's either #2 or #3.

Surprise! You could be mistaken. Here's the thing. You need to know the thickness of each individual tier for the entire cake before the question can be answered.

Let's run through an example. If B/D #1 makes their cake tiers 5 inches thick (*tall*) and B/D #2 and B/D #3 makes cake that are 3.5 inches thick (*tall*), you will actually get the most cake from B/D #1.

You say no way! We say yes way! Here are the actual numbers: B/D #1 would provide you with 665.7 cubic inches of cake, B/D #3 would give you 599.1 cubic inches of cake, and B/D #2 gives you only 499.28 cubic inches of cake.

Remember, you need to know the actual diameter plus the actual thickness of each tier to determine which cake serves the most.

You might ask, why is this important? Because 85% of B/Ds charge by the slice.

If you use my example, attaching a \$5 per slice price tag, B/D #1 was clearly giving you a better value than B/D #2 by a whopping 20% margin.

Although on the surface, it appeared B/D #2 was giving you a cake that was 7% larger. That adds up to a \$270 difference in value.

Secret

#3

Watch out for frozen cakes made in a food manufacturing facility. They might claim they are made on site and, "oh, so fresh."

Do bakeries actually freeze their cakes? How dry will my cake be?

Research has shown a certain percentage of B/Ds who claim to bake their own cakes are actually purchasing prebaked frozen cakes from a cake manufacturer or food service supplier.

The necessity to lie is obvious. They know if they told the truth, you probably wouldn't buy a cake from them. Furthermore, they recognize the public's perception of a frozen cake equals dry, tasteless, inferior, and cheap cake.

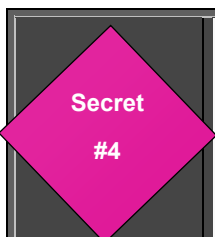
That was true 20 years ago, but we can tell you first-hand, there are wholesale cake bakers that produce rich flavorful cakes. Many of them can rival freshly baked cakes. Quite a few times, even better. Don't buy into the fallacy that all frozen cakes are garbage. (If you are thinking, "Oh sure, they are making a case for frozen cakes because a few "Gold Standard" bakers use them in their bakeries." They don't.)

Our research shows that B/Ds who buy frozen cakes actually pay more for a frozen cake than if they baked them from scratch. In fact, up to 75% more.

The reason they buy frozen cakes isn't because they are cheaper, it's a convenience and production issue.

We know it sounds like frozen versus fresh is a non-issue. But here's the deal. Unless a B/D really shells out the big bucks for high quality frozen cake, you are not going to get one. (*Most of them buy moderately priced frozen cakes.*) And we couldn't find any B/Ds using these high-quality cakes. Most of them are sold to country clubs, private clubs, high-end caterers, and high-end restaurants.

If you take the time to test-taste cakes from every B/D you're considering, it shouldn't matter. We're not saying it's okay for the B/D to lie, but if the cake tastes great, it shouldn't matter if they baked them in their bakery or it came from a cake factory in Podunk, Idaho.

 <p>Secret #4</p>	<p>Watch out for the "bait and switch" cake tasting testing technique. When you test taste your cake they give you the best cake they have, but they bake your actual wedding cake using a lower cost mix, and/or a cheaper filling, hoping you don't notice. This saves them a ton of money. Are you really getting the exact cake you "taste tested" or is there some funny business going on?</p>
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Here's how this scam works. *When you "taste-test" your sample cakes, they serve their finest cakes and fillings. However, when they make your actual wedding cake, they use lower cost and lower quality ingredients, fillings, and frostings...hoping you don't notice the difference.*

The reason it works is very clever. When you are taste-testing cakes, you are entirely focused on the cakes in front of you. There are no distractions. At your reception, you are gliding from one table to the next talking to relatives and friends you haven't seen for years. The DJ is playing music, the photographer is taking pictures; you are being distracted by a hundred other things.

See the difference in your state of mind between the two events? At your wedding, your mind is bouncing between ten things going on around you as compared to being at the B/D's store with only one thing on your mind.

An unscrupulous B/D knows you won't notice the difference at your reception. Besides, many of the brides we polled didn't even have a piece of their own wedding cake. How could they have known the difference?

Although you cannot really stop this practice, ask the question, ***"Is this the same cake (frosting, or filling) I am going to receive at my reception?"*** Psychologically, this puts them on the defensive to know you might be checking.

Secret

#5

You get charged a higher price for your cake because you were told a senior staff member or a more skilled designer is required to decorate your cake. In reality it is handed off to someone being trained and needs the experience at half the cost.

Are you getting gouged on the price of your cake by having a less qualified designer decorate it?

This is a common practice used in other businesses as well as the B/D industry. The first occupations that come to mind are law firms, physicians, accounting firms, and architects. You probably know of a few you can fill in.

Here's how it works. You walk into a specific high-profile cake boutique. A high-profile designer by the name of Monique` greets and speaks with you a while, probing your wedding cake desires. Then she draws up a fabulous design, which you love, so you quickly sign an agreement for the creation of your dream cake. You leave the shop thinking to yourself, *"Wow, what a creative genius. I know I am paying more to use her, but she's worth it."*

We hate to burst your bubble, but sometimes your high-profile designer does not decorate the cake. Your cake actually gets decorated by an hourly decorator or an apprentice. Monique` runs the show, but she is rarely doing the work. She just charges like she is working 20 hours decorating your cake.

Let's give you an analogy. A high-profile senior attorney talks to you about your personal injury lawsuit. He believes it's going to be a cakewalk (*I couldn't help myself*) to the tune of \$2,000,000. So, he takes your case.

In reality, he turns the case over to one of his junior partners to prepare for trial. The junior attorney is the one who spends 100 hours preparing the case. If the case is won, the senior attorney gets the credit. Just like the high-profile cake designer who turns the order over to their assistant. If the cake is beautiful, the designer gets the credit.

If Monique` is talking about her special skills utilizing pulled sugar, rolled buttercream, use of white chocolate paste or a host of other specialized materials and techniques, ask her point blank if she is the one who will be decorating your cake or is someone else? Make sure you are getting your money's worth. If you find out an apprentice will decorate your cake...you're being over charged.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *Let me give you an example you might relate to a little better. When you see a designer wedding dress from Vera Wang or Oleg Cassini, did you think they were personally cutting material and sewing your dress somewhere in a clothing warehouse? Yet, when they speak with a wedding cake artist, brides assume "Monique" is personally in the back baking and decorating their cake. The deal is, sometimes they do and sometimes they don't!*

If the designer isn't going to be decorating the cake, they should tell you an assistant will to doing it. If that's the case, the cake should cost less...*around 25% less.*

Secret

#6

The decorator says they can duplicate the picture you brought in from a magazine or the Internet down to the last detail, but in reality, they can't.
Watch out for the under-qualified over-rated designer.

One of today's biggest myth is, *"Sure, I can duplicate any picture off the Internet, or you find in a magazine. Just bring it in, honey."* Or, *"All those cake decorators who are on the cable TV challenges don't have a thing on me. I can do every one of those."*

Here's the reality; **a whopping 16% of brides are dissatisfied with their cake if one B/D attempts to duplicate another B/D's masterpiece.**

Why? Most B/D's view themselves as artists, more specifically, cake artists. However, like most artists, they tend to specialize. Depending on the decorating style pulled off the Internet or from a magazine, the copycat B/D is usually not as skilled as the originator of the cake. The result: The cake is not as good either.

Here's another reason; B/Ds are getting sick and tired of other B/Ds ripping off their ideas from wedding cakes posted on the Internet. To fight back, B/Ds are posting wedding cakes that utilize some special technique or material no one knows about except them. Then, if you take the photo to another B/D, they can't figure it out.

Strangely, there are B/Ds who believe they are good enough to recreate the cake. Unfortunately, very often they are as successful as Brittany Spear's personal life.

Oh sure, there are exceptions. After all, 84% of B/Ds still do a good enough job to satisfy the bride.

You'll have to decide if 4 out of 5 odds are good enough.

Secret

#7

You think you are paying for name brand fillings and liqueurs such as Reese's™ Peanut Butter Cup, Bailey's™ Irish Crème, or Di Sarino™ Amaretto, when some B/Ds actually use imitator brands—pocketing more profits.
Just like purse and shoe knockoffs, watch out for top-shelf flavor knockoffs.

This is another *"dirty little trick"* to save money and hope you don't notice.

Let's take Irish Crème for example. Three widely sold brands are, Bailey's™, Carolans™, and McCormack's™.

Bailey's™ is around \$32 for a 750ml bottle whereas Carolans™ or McCormack's™ may only cost around \$16 per 750ml bottle.

The B/D advertises they only use the finest liqueurs, such as Bailey's™ Irish Crème in their cakes and fillings. So, of course, they price those cakes much higher. As a consumer, you understand the difference between low priced and high-priced liqueurs, so it makes sense they charge a lot more. After all, you get what you pay for...right?

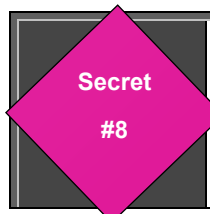
Not always.

Here's why. **This unscrupulous B/D knows by the time you douse the cake with the alcohol and cover it with frosting, you can't really tell which brand it is.**

To take advantage of this profitable liqueur knock-off, the B/D tells you they are using Bailey's™ on your cake and they charge you for Bailey's™ but, they use Carolans™ instead. (Nothing against Carolans, but it costs about one-half the price of Baileys.)

This also holds true for name brand candy. Currently, Reese's Peanut Butter Cup™ by the pound costs a B/D around \$8, while the B/D can buy an imitator brand for about \$4 per pound. By the time the B/D mixes it with some chocolate mousse or another ingredient, it is hard for you to tell the difference.

I wish we could give you the solution, but there isn't one. My advice, as repetitive as it may be, is to use a trusted and respected B/D. If you find out they are lying, turn them in to the local better business bureau, or contact a rep for the company who they are misrepresenting. You may not be able to recover any money, but at least they might stop their unethical antics with future brides.

 <p>Secret #8</p>	<p>A Baker/Designer charges you a bundle for custom handmade gum paste flowers. Actually, they were made in the Far East by someone getting paid \$. 75 per hour.</p> <p>Handmade flowers can run into the hundreds or thousands of dollars, so make sure you are getting what you pay for.</p>
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Gum paste flowers are quite the craze for 2022 and have been for about the last 5 years. More and more B/Ds are using them in place of fresh flowers, frosting flowers, or silk flowers.

Prepared by a skilled craftsperson, they will closely imitate the actual flower. B/Ds and brides alike believe gum paste flowers give a cake an appealing rich elegance. For numerous cake designs, you could make the argument they look better than fresh flowers.

Here's the scam: Some B/Ds will claim to make their own gum paste flowers. They will tell you about the tedious long hours it takes to hand-make these delicate gems of nature. They'll justify the hundreds or thousands of dollars in labor (*they are charging you*) it takes to make your unique flowers.

What a bunch of BS! All they do is pick up the phone and place an order for them.

They buy them from wholesalers with overseas operations in China or another Far East country that are popping them out for pocket change.

As an example, you order a gorgeous 150 serving 4-tiered wedding cake for a late spring reception. The cake has a wonderful flow of brightly colored cascading gum paste flowers. The arrangements are full and quite elegant. The cost to the B/D: \$215. The price from the B/D to the bride for these, *"I had to miss Easter dinner and give up hunting eggs with my children to make hundreds of hand-made flowers for you."* \$1025.

We sometimes wonder, do B/Ds like that watch the academy awards and see themselves as possible recipients?

Before you flip-out, we're not saying your B/D is going to scam you, nor are we saying all B/Ds buy pre-made gum paste flowers, because about 65% make their own.

Let's use the previous example and say your B/D charges you \$1025 for a beautiful arrangement of gum paste flowers. Allow me to say, they are earning every last penny. That is "IF" they are making them.

Doing gum paste flowers is tedious and labor intensive. It takes skill and an artistic flare to make great looking arrangements. If a B/D is charging you \$1000, they will spend approximately 20 hours creating and assembling your flowers. *(For those of you who are not math whizzes, that's \$50 per hour.)* The B/Ds we surveyed try to profit at a rate of \$40-\$150 per hour for gum paste flowers or other gum paste decorations. Although those prices are all over the map, they are fair and reasonable.

Secret

#9

Displays are being decorated by the most skilled decorator on staff, but your wedding cake is actually decorated by someone with less skill.

If you choose a wedding cake from a display, is the person decorating your wedding cake the one who decorated the display? Probably not.

When you see wedding cakes in cake decorating magazines, bridal publications, at bridal fairs, in showrooms or photo albums of B/Ds, they are presenting the best they have to offer.

Of course, they want to impress you with their best work. To accomplish this, they use their most talented people to decorate them. Keep that in mind, when ordering your wedding cake.

Most B/Ds will have their most skilled person or people decorate those fantastic looking displays. However, in many circumstances, an average of 50% of the wedding cake orders are decorated by other staff decorators who are not quite as good. Consequently, your wedding cake doesn't look as sharp and precise as the display.

To overcome this possible consistency issue, ask the B/D if the person decorating your cake is the same person who decorated the display or photo. If they are not, make sure you feel confident another decorator on staff has the skill to duplicate their work. Otherwise...RUN!

If you're using a home baker or a small cake boutique, you won't need to worry about this concern.

Some decorations are relatively easy for any decorator to duplicate. If that is the case with the decoration you choose, you should be fine. Problems typically arise when the decorations are complex. You'll have to make a judgment call.

Secret

#10

If a Baker/designer offers FREE delivery, 98% of the time the price of the delivery is built into the price of the wedding cake. You just don't know how much.

Can you really get FREE delivery? Well maybe.

We found the most truthful B/Ds charge separately (*78% of B/Ds*) for the delivery of your cake. They give you the option of picking it up, for free of course, or having it delivered for a fee.

Here's the problem with B/Ds who say delivery is free; **THEY ARE PROBABLY STRETCHING THE TRUTH.**

We both know a B/D has to supply a vehicle, insurance, taxes, gas, and a driver to deliver a wedding cake. Even if the B/D personally delivers your cake, it's still costing her or him time and money, which are not free, especially in this day and age.

Here's what is really going on, the B/D is building-in approximately \$20-\$75 to the price of your cake to cover the cost of delivery and make a profit from the delivery.

Notice we didn't say...to cover the "*delivery expense.*"

Their real intent is to...**PROFIT** from the delivery. It isn't to offer it for free.

Ask them if your price will be reduced by \$25-\$75 if you pick up your cake.

If they say, "*Well, we don't normally discount wedding cakes if you pick them up,*" it basically proves they'll make less on your cake, if you pick it up.

Candid B/Ds, like honest service companies, provide an itemized list of every separate chargeable item on your order. **Itemized lists are used to demonstrate honesty in sales.** If they don't...**RUN!**

The exceptions are B/Ds who serve you through hotels and country clubs. They offer package pricing with everything included.

Secret

#11

There are Baker/Designers who have great reputations and handle 30-50 wedding cakes per weekend. Would it shock you to find out they might not be making yours?

Did it ever occur to you your Baker/Designer might be subcontracting much of the work between 2-5 other bakeries or decorators working out of their homes?

Ask the B/D how many wedding cakes per weekend they produce. Because of ego reasons, you'll probably get the truth if they make 30-50 per week. It is very hard for most owners or managers not to brag about the quantity and the amount of effort that it takes to handle all those orders.

Ask them if they bake and decorate all their own wedding cakes. 99.9% of them will say yes.

The secret: Some of these B/Ds subcontract a portion of their wedding cakes to other B/Ds.

Here's how they do it. Let's say Candy's Cake Cottage has 21 wedding cakes for the weekend. But she only has staff and storage space for 15 wedding cakes. She calls her subcontractor B/Ds and gives them the other 6 orders.

To make sure you don't know the difference, Candy bakes the cakes for her 16 other orders and sends them over to her subs. The subs have a complete listing of all the wedding cakes Candy's provides so they can decorate the order exactly as requested. The subs even deliver the wedding cakes as ordered. The sub typically gets 75%-80% of the total price, deducting the cost of ingredients, leaving Candy a 20%-25% profit margin.

If this arrangement outrages you, don't go reaching for the anti-depressants.

Here's what we want you to think about. Many cake shops hire part-time decorators just for the weekend to decorate wedding cakes. In essence, that is all Candy is doing. Candy knows her reputation is on the line.

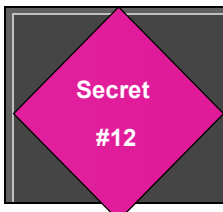
To make sure things go smoothly, she only partners with B/Ds that are reliable and first-rate. Does it really make a difference if the cakes are being decorated at Candy's shop or another location?

You probably think we are going to slap around the B/Ds who do this, but not this time. We would even go as far to say, you might be better off with Candy. At least she has an efficient system that offers brides great cakes and has quality control standards that are better than many B/Ds.

Although subcontracting wedding cakes is a behind the scenes secret, don't spend any time getting bent out of shape.

We don't believe your chance of a problem popping up with your wedding cake is any greater than with any other B/D. Besides the cake business, you probably would be surprised to find out how many companies subcontract their work to others.

(Once again, we are not making a case for this practice. No "Gold Standard Wedding Cake Baker" we're aware of uses wedding cake subcontractors.)

 <p>Secret #12</p>	<p>Here's a great trick to make you believe your Baker/Designer is a really fantastic designer who can command a higher price. They purchase phony trophies, ribbons, and doctored photographs to give themselves the appearance of being an award-winning designer.</p> <p>Don't fall for the "award winning designer" scam.</p>
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This is how it works: **A B/D buys phony trophies, ribbons, and doctored photographs to give themselves the appearance of being an award-winning designer.**

Yes, you can laugh all you want, but this happens probably more than we even know.

Here's why it works. As humans, we are programmed to believe anyone who has an award, trophy, ribbon, or other rewards of achievement must be really good; they must be an expert.

In psychology, this is referred to as "*The Authority Principle.*" Which goes something like this: You are much more susceptible to believing or following someone who has authority and is an expert. As an example, a policeman, a doctor, a member of clergy, or a teacher are people in the position of authority. They are seen as holding authority and are respected as experts.

Now enter a B/D with all these "*recognitions of accomplishment.*" It gives them instant credibility in your eyes. As a result, your subconscious will allow you to pay more because you are buying something from a "*perceived expert.*" In essence, you become "*star struck.*" Your mind starts to play tricks on you as if you met a famous movie or rock star.

If you visit a B/D who displays these awards, be cautious. Don't let the ribbons and trophies allow you to be "*star struck.*" Force yourself to see beyond their "*wall of accomplishments.*"

Keep a clear head by using the advice given in this book and using the same criteria for choosing any B/D.

Secret

#13

Not all B/Ds have required health department permits.

Do you want to protect your guests from tainted cake and yourself from a costly lawsuit?

In most cities, municipalities or states, the health department requires a permit to operate a food establishment. This typically includes any facility where a B/D makes their cakes.

Ask your B/D if they are required to have a health permit and whether they have one. Admittedly, a health department or equivalent permit doesn't guarantee sanitary conditions, but at least it keeps a B/D on their toes. It gives you a certain amount of confidence the B/D is following the rules and regulations for the sanitary safety of their customers...like you.



"PERSONAL-MANIAC" TIP: *Most brides "assume" B/Ds have all the required permits and licenses to conduct business. Let me give you a little "life" secret. Using the word "assume" should be against the law. It doesn't take a fight with your fiancée to cause pain. "Assuming" anything typically causes more grief.*

Also, there is another key reason you want the B/D to have the proper permits.

In the event there is food poisoning or another medically related problem with the cake and someone requires medical attention, you could incur a sizeable lawsuit.

One of the issues that could arise will be whether the health department approved the facility. If it was not, it might compound your problems. Please understand the potential for trouble if you use someone who is not health department approved. We strongly suggest you to not use anyone without proper permits or liability insurance. If they don't have them...RUN!

NOTICE: We're going to stand by what we've stated above. However, there are several states and municipalities that have what are called "cottage food" laws, which allows home bakers to sell wedding cakes with no permits of any kind. If you're okay with it, then just be careful.

We say this because brick and mortar bakeries still need to comply with health regulations, but some home bakers do not. Does that make any sense? For example, have you ever seen a dog or cat in a commercial bakery? How about some one's house? Like I said, be careful.

Secret
#14

Any Baker/Designer you choose needs to have certain required permits to do business in your city, county, parish, district, or state? What are they?

Does the business you work for have all the legal documents to operate a business?
Don't you think your Baker/Designer should?

Some areas of the country may require a state agricultural permit, an occupancy permit, or a host of other permits. **Any respectable and law-abiding B/D should have all the required permits for public viewing.** If they don't...RUN!

If you ignore this warning, you are placing yourself at needless risk. Especially, for the purchase of a wedding cake.

Please keep things in perspective. A cake is typically one of the inexpensive items (about 3%-5% of your budget) for your wedding. Do you really want to risk a potential lawsuit over saving \$100-\$200?

It drives us crazy when we hear stories of brides using a recognized caterer, they pay \$12,000, but then use someone working out of their house to save \$100 on their wedding cake.

If you decide to ignore this warning, please make sure YOU have good insurance.

Secret
#15

Make sure the changes you make to your order are actually made. Otherwise, your cake will look...half-right.

Should I be fearful of making changes on my order?

Be afraid...very afraid! That may be a classic line from the 1986 movie “The Fly,” but, you should be afraid of making modifications to your order.

Making changes to your wedding cake always ranks as one of the top 3 reasons for mistakes.

This is a classic case of miscommunication. Our surveys yielded 8 typical reasons why this happens:

- 1) The B/D is disorganized, takes poor notes, or didn’t write down exactly what you wanted.
- 2) The order form or whatever method of capturing information is not detailed enough to make all the instructions clear as a bell.
- 3) An original order was taken and then the bride made changes later, but they didn’t get changed correctly on the order form.
- 4) The same as the last answer, but the changes were made only a few days prior to the reception, and they didn’t make it to the original order form.
- 5) A first person took the original order, but then a second person or even a third person made modifications to the order without completely understanding the original order or the first change.
- 6) The B/D was baking or decorating multiple cakes at the same time and got the orders mixed up.
- 7) The B/D did not label the wedding cakes for delivery or labeled them improperly and yours was mixed up with someone else’s. *(We interviewed a B/D in Seattle who stated she had 3 identically decorated wedding cakes on the same afternoon. As it turned out, she delivered each one to the wrong reception.)*
- 8) The B/D made changes to someone else’s order instead of your order or your order was changed instead of someone else’s.

How do you prevent these from happening to you? **Try to establish whether the B/Ds you’re visiting are organized.**

Here are some things to look for:

- Are their order forms clear, concise, and orderly or are they using a legal pad to write down stuff with information spread all over?
- Ask them how and where they store their wedding cake orders.
- Ask them how they track your cake from beginning to completion, including the delivery.
- Make sure you get a final copy of your order. If you change anything, make sure you get the updated version.
- Ask them what their guarantee is. Get it in writing.

You can avoid most of these problems if you finalize everything thirty days in advance. If at all possible, do not make any last-minute changes. If you are still somewhat uncertain, we suggest going over your order one last time, about a week in advance of your reception.

Most Baker/Designers do not have a written guarantee.

Ask your Baker/Designer for their guarantee. If they don't have a written one, you might think about heading for the door.

In our research, 98%, of independent B/Ds do not have a “written guarantee.” *(That number is beginning to change thanks to the impact our book is having.)*

They claim their guarantee is a “*verbal*” understanding for warranting their product. Our study did not include grocery stores because they are the most likely to stand behind their product under any circumstances.

We interviewed 143 brides who had problems with their cakes and asked them how it was resolved. About 80% of the time the B/D handled it in a mutually beneficial way. However, the other 20% of the time, the B/D did not take responsibility. Refunds amounted to minimal in-store credits to full refunds.

In the event you need to drag your B/D to small claims court, you DON'T want to find out how far a “*verbal*” guarantee will get you.

We interviewed someone who sued their B/D because they claimed the cake was not decorated to their specifications.

The judge asked for the order form that spelled out how the cake was decorated along with a picture of the cake. They told the judge they felt the vertical stripes on the cake were crooked. The judge admitted some of the stripes were a little crooked, but not enough to side with the plaintiff.

The judge stated that if the order form (*contract*) had stated, all the stripes shall be straight or if they had a written guarantee to that effect, he would have sided with the plaintiff.

If the B/D had a guarantee, the whole court sideshow could have been prevented.

Here are 16 common problems:

- 1) Cake didn't get made.
- 2) Wrong design.
- 3) Cake fell apart or fell over.
- 4) Cake was leaning severely.
- 5) Cake was not the correct shape.
- 6) Not the correct number of servings.
- 7) Delivered more than one hour after the reception began.
- 8) Not the correct flavor(s).
- 9) Not the correct filling(s).
- 10) Decorated with the wrong color.
- 11) Incorrect number of tiers.
- 12) Wrong frosting.
- 13) Missing decorative hand-made decorations.
- 14) Poor execution of design.

- 15) Did not receive topper.
- 16) Did not receive stand.

The bottom line is this; you can't force a B/D to give you a written guarantee. You'll have to decide if you are willing to take the risk.

(Since bakers are able to take training [as of June 2021] based on the research in this book, they can provide a guarantee that does a wonderful job of protecting both you and them. Have them call me at 402-968-2758 to get one, or I can call on your behalf. I'd be happy to assist.

Secret

#17

Many Baker/Designers charge you dearly if you cancel your cake.
Can anyone say, "Here's a quick way to lose 250 dollars?"

We hope you don't have to cancel, but just in case you do, be prepared to know, and accept the terms. **Understanding the cancellation policy before you place your order can save you indigestion later. Be careful what you agree to because we found cancellation policies vary as much as the weather.**

To help you, here are some questions you should consider asking:

- 1) How much will I lose if I cancel my order the day after I order it? How about one month prior to the wedding or one week before the wedding?
- 2) What if I call you two weeks *(or choose any time period, like 2 months)* before the wedding and need to postpone my wedding for six months, will I still incur a cancellation fee?
- 3) Will my refund be a cash form of payment, or will it be in-store credit?
- 4) How long do I have to wait to receive my refund?
- 5) If you purchased a cake topper through the B/D, ask what their refund policy is?

If you are satisfied with their answers, you're good-to-go! If they don't have a cancellation policy in writing...RUN!

Secret

#18

Many B/Ds do not carry enough liability insurance. Some don't have any.
If you don't think getting sued should be part of your wedding plans, it's a good idea to ask about insurance.

Every B/D who has business insurance has something called a "*Certificate of Insurance.*" It spells out how much liability insurance they have. *(Notice we didn't say homeowner's insurance.)* Why is that important? We'll explain it using an example.

Let's say 150 guests are invited to your reception and everyone gets violently ill from eating contaminated cake. Don't you wish you had checked to make sure your B/D was properly insured? We're sure your heart would be pounding...just a little.

Would you begin to sweat like a fish if we told you, it could take around \$4,000,000 to settle the lawsuit caused from contaminated cake? Read on.

A study conducted by Jean Buzby, Paul Frenzen, and Barbara Rasco in 2002, involving jury verdicts in 32 states (1988-1997), revealed that plaintiffs won awards 31% of the time in food poisoning jury trials and received a median award of \$25,560.

Using my example of all 150 guests getting violently ill from the cake, your guests could potentially receive the median settlement of \$25,560 times 150 guests equaling \$3,834,000.

As long as we are working you into frenzy, we'll pile on some more frightening facts straight from **the Centers for Disease Control. There are 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5000 deaths each year from food.**

Now that you understand the importance of your B/D having liability insurance, let's answer the question, "How much should they have?"

To answer this question, we are going to use the amount of liability insurance a typical national franchise hotel demands when a B/D supplies cakes for their restaurant. The amount is typically between 2 million and 5 million dollars.

Discussing this topic with four national insurance companies, two million dollars in liability coverage seems to be the average. Although there are other factors determining the exact amount of liability coverage, this question is answered for the B/D who has standard exposure with up to 1 million dollars in revenue.

Grocery stores would carry much more liability insurance because they are covering the bakery, the deli, the floral department, and every other department under one policy.

My point is, make sure the B/D you have baking and decorating your wedding cake has a "Certificate of Insurance" demonstrating they are covered for liability insurance.

If they can't...RUN!

We say RUN because the stories we've heard about what's been found in some wedding cakes would make you queasy. All right, a lot more than queasy!

We don't want to come across as an alarmist but being protected is prudent. As difficult as it may be to ask this question, we would recommend it for your own piece of mind and your guests' well-being.

(Even though a disclaimer is provided in the front of this book, we want to remind you to seek competent advice for any insurance or legal questions. I am not a licensed insurance agent, nor a licensed attorney.)

Secret

#19

Some B/Ds have pending lawsuits against themselves or their business, they prefer you don't know.

If you want to get your money back from a dreadful wedding cake, you might have to wait in line.

Many B/Ds refuse to guarantee their wedding cakes. They hope a bride won't even ask. They worry brides will take advantage of the guarantee and want all their money back over the smallest thing that is wrong. Their position is, *"Sue me if you want your money back."*

Unfortunately, these B/Ds do follow through with their "tough guy attitudes." So, if the B/D and bride can't resolve a major issue with the cake, the bride or her parents land up litigating.

Wanting to understand why business owners (including B/Ds) take such hardline stances, we decided to start digging.

What we discovered was a complete contrast to conventional customer service wisdom.

Here's what I mean. Most business owners put the customer first. They train their staff to recognize the customer is always right, even when they are wrong. These business owners implement policies to handle complaints and problem customers.

In the end, the complaining customer typically gets something. It could be money back, an in-store credit, an exchange, gift certificates etc. But they always do something for their customers. These business owners know the statistics for customers who are out to scam them is very low. Unfortunately, it's part of running a business.

This is in sharp contrast to the **"Hardliner."** The hardliner does the total opposite of what the conventional business owner does. The hardliner believes being soft on customer complaints just eggs on more customer complaints. The hardliner believes all you do is start a cycle of refunds and giving away free stuff. They believe it is a recipe for ruining your business, not helping it. The hardliner would rather lose you as a customer than refund your money.

Did you catch that last sentence? **The hardliner would rather lose you as a customer than refund your money.** That is exactly why he or she is willing to battle you in court.

Here is a spot-on example. We interviewed a B/D who knew of a competitor who had been to either small claims court or civil court...8 times over the last 3 years! (That is one hardheaded person.) This B/D will not refund anyone's money if they think the cake looks fine.

They do not care if the bride doesn't like it. To this B/D, if the cake was what you ordered and looked great to them, they would rather have you take them to court than issue you any type of partial or full refund.

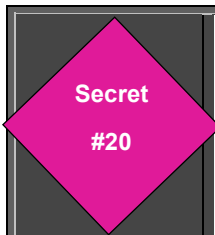
If what has been revealed so far isn't enough for you to avoid B/Ds without a guarantee, here's another reason you might want to know an answer to the question; Have you or your business been involved in any lawsuits during the last 3 years?

It's called "*financial strength*." It is a measurement of a company's ability to pay its financial obligations. If you have to wait in line to get your money, you may never see it. One single lawsuit can bury a company, let alone more than one.

For example, if the B/D is being sued for any reason and loses, the award amount could be high enough to make them file bankruptcy, causing them to immediately close their doors. This scenario leaves you without a cake and the money you paid toward it.

The bottom line. If an owner has been sued in the last couple of years or has a pending lawsuit, it's probably not someone you should do business with. You got it...RUN!

(Once again, I am providing an opinion. I am not a licensed attorney, nor giving you legal advice.)

	<p>Your personal information may not be protected, and it could be available to any employee.</p> <p>Are you aware your information is most likely accessible to people in the bakery who you don't know and have never met? Worse, they may have access to your home address, phone number, and possibly your credit card information.</p>
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If your privacy is important to you, ask your B/D if they have a "*privacy policy*." A privacy policy helps protect the personal information you give to the B/D. Most of the time, B/Ds do not ask for information that would be useful for an identity thief.

However, if you believe your B/D is asking for too much private information, we recommend only giving them what is necessary or what you feel comfortable giving. Also, ask how they store your information and who is available to access it.

Here is a list of personal questions B/Ds may ask. If they ask more than what is on the list, be skeptical of supplying the answers.

- 1) Your first and last name.
- 2) Your home phone number.
- 3) Your cell phone number.
- 4) Your home address.
- 5) Your email address.
- 6) Your work phone number.
- 7) Your employer.
- 8) Your employer's phone number.
- 9) Your driver's license number.

They may also ask many of the same questions regarding your fiancée and your parents or guardian. In addition, if you pay by check or with credit card the B/D may record and store the information. Make sure they are protecting it.

Ask them if their customer list or database is shared or sold to others. If it is, request your name be removed. Keep in mind, many small companies without privacy policies still sell or share their customer lists to noncompetitive businesses for some extra money.



Eye-Opening Topic 11 — Wedding Cake Disaster Stories

Wedding Cake Catastrophes Told by Brides (sometimes laughing — sometimes weeping) and How You Can Stop Them from Happening to You...Most of The Time

Catastrophes are going to happen. But it isn't necessary they happen to you. Read our favorite dozen stories with both amusement and a little anxiety. Then follow the advice...v-e-r-y carefully.

Disaster

11-1:

My wedding cake tasted like a pair of dirty socks, and it crumbled like a two-year-old cookie.

The cake didn't taste like anything we sampled. It crumbled, tasted gross, and the frosting stuck to roof of your mouth. I was extremely embarrassed.

If the cake lands up not tasting like anything you sampled, it was probably caused by one of the following reasons:

- The B/D changed their recipes without you knowing.
- The B/D had a new baker or chef bake the cakes.
- They changed ingredients.
- The recipe was prepared incorrectly.
- Or, the cakes were frozen for a considerable length of time.

You can ask the following questions to help prevent some of these issues:

- 1) When was the last time you changed your recipes for your cake, and are you planning to change them before my wedding date?
- 2) Who bakes the cakes? Are they leaving anytime soon?
- 3) Do you freeze my wedding cake?
- 4) If you do, how far in advance is it frozen?

In any event, you must get sample cakes of the exact flavors from the respective B/Ds you are considering. This also includes the exact filling(s) if you are having any and the exact frosting. This is the only way you can screen your B/Ds cakes and frostings.

Disaster 11-2:	My jaw hit the floor when I saw my wedding cake. Not because it was perfect, because it must have been decorated by the B/D's five-year old child.
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The cake was entirely wrong. The colors were the wrong shade of purple, about half of the decorations I wanted on the cake weren't on the cake, the decorations that were on the cake were uneven and my wedding cake topper had a piece broken off.

As it turns out, the pastry chef who decorated this wedding cake had been hitting the sauce. He was...INTOXICATED!

Later he admitted dropping the topper on the floor, which explained the missing piece. The colors didn't match because his sight was impaired (*from the alcohol*), and the decorations were irregular because his hands were shaking like a leaf while decorating the cake.

Outside of being tipsy, most of the time, this scenario is indicative of a B/D who is disorganized.

Here are some suggestions to prevent this from happening to you:

- First, make sure you receive a copy of the FINAL order. Remember, we said the final order. Many brides make adjustments to their cake time and time again, right up to the last week, even the last few days.
- Second, after receiving the final order, make sure you go over it with a fine-tooth comb. If you don't understand something or believe certain details are left out, call, and get it corrected.
- Third, call three to five days before your reception and simply check to see if your order is in the process of being made and ask if there are any remaining unanswered questions.
- Fourth, ask to see your wedding cake the morning of your reception. Most B/Ds welcome your visitation or they will text you an image, if it will help calm your nerves.

Between these four steps, you'll be able to bring down your anxiety a couple of notches.

Disaster 11-3:	I had a person do my wedding cake who was a friend of a co-worker from my office. After all it saved me \$201. Actually, it cost me a lifetime of bad memories.
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Here are the details straight from the bride.

*“Here is the lesson I would like to share from my personal disaster. **Do not bend to any pressure to keep the peace in your family or with anyone you know.**” Hire a professional who decorates cakes for a living.*

I am going to tell you what happened to me in no certain order. This is like a comedy of errors or horrors...

- I could never reach her when I wanted to. She always called me back when she got around to it.*
- Her oven wasn't big enough to bake the bottom layer of my wedding cake, so she pieced together smaller cakes to make a larger bottom cake.*
- The frosting was crusty and tasted like it had granules of sand in it.*
- She bought monogram initials for me to put on top of the cake, but they were the wrong initials.*
- Since my wedding was close to Christmas, she decided to decorate the cake with live Poinsettias. Afterwards, I found out they are poisonous, and you never place them in contact with food.*
- She didn't have anywhere to store the wedding cake the night before the reception, so to keep it cold, she kept it in the trunk of her car.”*

Now then, what can we add? This story illustrates the all too common, but...I'll save a \$100. After all, she's a friend of my neighbor's daughters' brother-in-laws sister's aunt.

If someone says they know someone through someone who...RUN!

Disaster

11-4:

When you pay \$3000 for a wedding cake to serve 300 guests, you expect it to serve 300...not 200. A year later I am still apologizing to my friends that didn't get a piece of cake.

This disaster is covered in OFF-THE-RECORD BUZZs: 10-2 “*Beware of the size game.*” Remember there is no industry standard when it comes to matching the total servings of a cake to the sizes of the tiers you'll receive.

We have seen many cutting guides. Some are very clear, and some are not. Depending on the cutting guide, the serving sizes and thus overall servings will vary.

On behalf of the Gold Standard Bakers, we created a cutting guide, which is fair for everyone. At this time, all GSB's are using our standardized “**A Second-Graders Guide to Cutting a Wedding Cake.**” It is in the appendix section.

(In the disaster story, Stephanie, paid \$3,000 for a 300 serving wedding cake with the tier sizes of: 16” square=128 servings, 12” round=56 servings, 9” round=32 servings, and a 6” round=12 servings. Unfortunately, they only total 216 servings, without counting the top tier.)

Disaster

11-5:

We had an outdoor reception with the wedding cake placed on a lovely table beside a flower garden. Everything looked beautiful until the cake attracted every bee for 50 miles.

There were so many bees, they had to send someone to the nearest store to buy wasp spray and spray the entire wedding cake just to get rid of the bees. Needless to say, not a piece got served. How bizarre is that?

As it turns out, a new gardener was hired by the property owner of the event site. The gardener was unaware that certain flowers attract more bees and insects than other types of flowers. Of course, he had planted hundreds of annual flowers that attracted bees.

This is one of those odd circumstances that isn't addressed in this guide. There really are no preventative measures to take.

The moral of the story is this: Think twice about serving food outside around sweetly scented flowers.

Disaster
11-6:

I don't know what was more embarrassing; when my maid of honor fell smack on the floor from having one too many...or when my wedding cake fell smack on the floor.

Having a wedding cake fall over happened with more frequency before the 90's. Since 2000 the numbers have dropped dramatically. (*According to our last survey conducted Feb. 2020.*)

Before 2000, most B/Ds used either what are called doll rods, which are wooden pegs for support to separate the tiers, they used plastic doll rods, or straws.

Finally, a few cake decorating supply companies started coming out with new and improved methods of supporting tiers. Today, most B/Ds use either a support system that uses sturdy plastic pillars attached to a plastic plate the exact size of the tier above or they use adjustable metal support systems.

A wedding cake falling over today is a rare occurrence for an experienced B/D. However, if you are using a newer B/D who doesn't have a lot of experience or who is cheap...this is a valid concern.

Here's how to relieve yourself of this issue. **When you are interviewing B/Ds, ask them how they separate the tiers. Or what support system they use to separate tiers and keep them from leaning, or from falling over.**

Now, if the cake is too warm, even a good support system will not prevent your wedding cake from falling apart. This usually is indicative of the reception hall being too hot, the cake was delivered too far in advance of the reception, or the cake not being cooled sufficiently before delivery.

Disaster
11-7:

Don't feel too badly for those bride's wedding cakes that show up an hour after the reception begins. At least they received a wedding cake.

Because the fear of not getting your wedding cake "on-time" is so high on the list of anxieties, I thought it would be good to reemphasize the same answer to this problem from Question: 9-8.

- Begin by getting the cell phone number of the person responsible for delivering the cake. Not the owner, the manager, or the dishwashers' phone numbers. (Unless one of them is delivering your cake.) You want the cell phone of the actual person delivering the cake.

- Designate someone from your party as a “contact person,” to be in charge of accepting the cake. Give them the B/Ds phone number and the phone number of the person delivering the cake.

Then have your “contact person” follow through with one of the following:

- ✓ Meet the delivery driver of your cake at the reception or
- ✓ Have your “contact person” go the reception site shortly after the arranged time of delivery to make sure it arrived or
- ✓ Give the phone number of your “contact person” to the caterer, wedding planner, or whomever is in charge of the reception site. Tell them you would appreciate a call to your “contact person” after the cake arrives or
- ✓ Have your B/D call your “contact person” as soon as the cake has been delivered and set-up to let them know everything went fine.

Any of the above actions will give you confirmation of a successful delivery. If for some reason the person who is supposed to call your “*contact person*” doesn’t call, make sure your “*contact person*” calls them.

Disaster

11-8:

The wedding cake was supposed to be square instead of round; it was supposed to be 5 tiers instead of 3; it was supposed to have...OH NO...they delivered someone else’s wedding cake instead of mine!

Usually, this is not a problem with a small B/D who only makes 1-3 wedding cakes per weekend. It can be a larger problem for B/Ds who make 10-30 wedding cakes per weekend.

Use some of the advice from the previous story and you should be alright.

So far as advice goes, I suggest designating someone from your party as a “*contact person*” to be in charge of accepting the cake. If at all possible, give them a copy of the wedding cake photograph or a rough draft of what the wedding cake should look like.

Make sure your contact person has the B/Ds phone number and the phone number of the person delivering the cake. Then have your “*contact person*” follow through with a phone call if the wedding cake looks completely different than the one, they received from you.

Although B/Ds do not like to admit this type of mistake, it happens. Most of the time, the B/D catches the mistake before the bride shows up to the reception and corrects the problem without receiving a phone call.

Keep in mind, if they delivered someone else’s wedding cake to your reception, there is another bride who also has the wrong wedding cake. This is why most B/Ds catch their own mistakes.

This is a classic reason why your wedding cake should be delivered a minimum of 3 hours before the start of your reception.

Disaster

11-9

I like dogs and cats like the next person, but not when their hair is in my wedding cake. Also, why do you think my frosting tasted like cigarette smoke?

As it turns out, according to eyewitnesses, the person who delivered the wedding cake was smoking while delivering the wedding cake.

Later we found out, he was working from a home bakery where he owned a cat and dog. According to the bride, when she went to confront him, he was working on a birthday cake while his friends (*pets*) were watching him. Do we need to say more?

Solution: Make sure the wedding cake provider who makes your wedding cake has a no smoking policy for their establishment and the delivery vehicles. Also, NO PETS IN THE KITCHEN!

Disaster

11-10:

We had our reception in a lovely brand-new structure in the country. It was surrounded by old trees, waterfalls, and a lake. It didn't occur to me I would have a couple uninvited guests who would eat my wedding cake like a couple of wolves.

According to the B/D, it was his first time delivering to this new facility. In fact, they were still putting the finishing touches on the outside of the building and developing the landscaping.

He noticed what looked like a couple of wild dogs roaming around the property that ran past the front door as he pulled up. He cautiously brought the cake in keeping one eye on his vehicle and the front door as the wild dogs walked past.

As he drove off after setting-up the wedding cake, he stopped by the farmhouse on the property and told the owner that he was a little concerned about the wild dogs. He was told, *"Oh, they have lived on this property for years. Don't worry about them. They just look scary, but they won't hurt anyone."*

About three hours later the B/D gets a frantic phone call that his cake had fallen over. He was told to come immediately and fix it before the wedding party arrived. When he arrived, he instantly saw the wedding cake didn't just fall apart. It was in pieces all over the place. It was a complete mess.

Not worrying how that could have happened, the B/D replaced the wedding cake with an emergency wedding cake just before the guests arrived.

The next week the B/D received a phone call from the florist who stated that when she arrived at the wedding site, she thought she saw two dogs darting out of the front door but thought she must be seeing things. So, she dismissed it.

But when she heard about the wedding cake falling over and being completely smashed, she thought she would call to ask the B/D if he had seen any dogs roaming around.

At that point, the B/D contacted the owner of the new reception site and asked if they had security cameras on the premises. As it turns out, they did. The B/D asked if he could watch the recordings for the time period prior to the reception.

In the review of the recording, everyone was shocked to see the two wild dogs enter through the front door, jump on the cake table, and knock it over in an attempt to eat it. Then, it appears as if something spooked them, and they ran away.

Here's how it ended. The reception site owner reimbursed the B/D the price of the second wedding cake and gave the bride money back on the first wedding cake. Within one week, the wild dogs were captured and removed from the property.

Although this story is highly unusual, it does bring up an issue for your consideration.

Think twice about having your wedding reception at a brand-new facility. We're not saying you need to worry about wild dogs eating your wedding cake. But, until management of a new reception site has some experience under their belt and has worked out some of their start-up problems, you might want to recall this "crazed dog story."

The Last Word

My mission is to educate brides, so you will know how to find a “great” wedding cake Baker/Designer who is trustworthy, skilled, and offers fair prices.

Please help spread the word. Here’s how:

First, go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TheUltimateBridesGuide> and fill out a quick and easy survey, which helps us in our continuation of providing the best cutting-edge advice for brides.

At the end of the survey, please include any question(s) which you feel have not been addressed.

Second, give us the names of bakers who deserve to be recognized and receive the opportunity to serve brides who are eagerly looking for “great” wedding cake providers, in place of “good enough” cake artists.

If you are aware of a B/D who practices standards you’ve read about in this guidebook and believe they should be considered for inclusion into “*Gold Standard Wedding Cake Bakers of America*,” please contact ed@weddingcake.org.

• Appendix •

The Ultimate Recipe File for Wedding Cake Bliss:

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| 1) 129 Power-Shopping Questions to Help You Choose An
Awesome Baker | pages 152-155 |
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Short and Sweet Instructions for Buying Your Wedding Cake:

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| We've condensed every question, answer, piece of advice,
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129 Power-Shopping Questions

To Help You Choose an Awesome Baker/Designer

To compile a thorough list of questions for you to explore, we documented 129 FAQs from 500 bakery websites and 1643 brides.

We gave them the title "**129 Power-Shopping Questions**" to help you choose an awesome Baker/Designer... *because they really do!*

They are divided into 7 groups: 1) Consultation, 2) Baking/Flavors/Frostings, 3) Wedding Cake Design, 4) Delivery, 5) Pricing, 6) Contracts/Legal/Licenses, and 7) General.

Consultation

1. How much notice do you need to order a wedding cake?
2. May I taste your cakes before reserving the date with you?
3. Do you have my wedding date open?
4. Do I need to come in to order my wedding cake?
5. I'm out of town, can I order long distance?
6. Why do I need a consultation?
7. Do you allow walk-ins, or must I make an appointment?
8. How far in advance of my wedding date should I make an appointment?
9. What should I bring to the consultation?
10. How many people can I bring to my consultation?
11. What should I ask the baker during the consultation?
12. What can I expect at my consultation?
13. How long does the consultation last?
14. What is the cost of the consultation?
15. What day and times do you schedule wedding cake appointments?
16. What happens if I am running late to my appointment?
17. What if I have to cancel my appointment?
18. Are we under any obligation to order the cake when we come in for a consultation?
19. Do I need to have an exact date or reception site chosen before I schedule a consultation?
20. If I cannot find a cake I like, can I still reserve the date?
21. I'm getting married next week. Can you make me a short notice/emergency wedding cake?

Baking/Flavors/Frostings

1. Can we taste your cakes?
2. What flavors of cake do you offer?
3. What are your specialties?
4. Which cake flavors are most brides ordering?
5. Can I get a different flavor of cake for each tier?

6. What types of ingredients do you use?
7. I have an old family recipe; can you make it?
8. Do you make wedding cakes with dietary restrictions?
9. Who will bake my wedding cake?
10. How far in advance are your wedding cakes prepared?
11. Do you freeze your cakes after you bake them?
12. Are your cakes purchased frozen, from a mix or baked elsewhere?
13. What are my filling choices?
14. If I get a torte (filled cake), how is yours put together?
15. What types of frostings do you commonly use?
16. What's the difference between fondant and buttercream?
17. Why is your fondant better?
18. Will the weather affect my choice of frostings?

Wedding Cake Designs

1. Do you create custom cakes, or do I choose one of the cakes from your portfolio?
2. Do you have a portfolio of photos we can look at?
3. Do you specialize in any particular designs or sugar-pastes?
4. I've seen a few wedding cakes I like; can you combine them?
5. If I don't have a clear vision of what I would like, can you offer some design ideas based on my theme and budget?
6. If I provide you with a picture of what I'd like, can you recreate it? How do you price it?
7. Are there different prices depending on the design of the cake?
8. We're having a themed cake; how can you help me?
9. Does my cake need to match my wedding colors?
10. Can you match the colors for my cake to the bridesmaid's dresses?
11. Which shapes of wedding cakes do you offer?
12. Can I have multiple shapes using my design?
13. I am going to have an outdoor reception. How will that affect my cake options?
14. Do you supply fresh flowers?
15. Do you supply ribbon for the cake?
16. If I want to use fresh flowers on my cake, do you supply them or does my florist?
17. Can you make me a wedding cake using some fake tiers to make the cake appear larger?
18. Does the same person bake the cake who decorates the cake?
19. Can I meet the person who will decorate my wedding cake?
20. How far in advance are your wedding cakes decorated?
21. What kind of training or experience have you had decorating wedding cakes?
22. What options do you provide for wedding cake toppers?
23. Do you make groom's cakes?

Delivery/Pick-up

1. Do you deliver and set-up the cake?
2. What is your delivery area?
3. How far away will you deliver?
4. Do you ship wedding cakes outside of delivery area?

5. How much do you charge for delivery?
6. What time do you deliver the cake?
7. Who delivers and how are the cakes transported?
8. Can the delivery person repair my cake if it is damaged during delivery or set-up?
9. How do I transport my wedding cake?

Pricing

1. How are your wedding cakes priced?
2. What can I expect to pay for a wedding cake?
3. Do you have a menu of prices for me to see?
4. Do you have a minimum order in terms of servings and price for your wedding cakes?
5. Should I have a budget in mind for my wedding cake?
6. Can you quote the price over the phone?
7. Can you give me a price estimate via email?
8. Is a deposit required to hold the specific wedding day?
9. Does the wedding cake price include the top tier?
10. What types of payment do you accept?
11. Do your prices include fresh flowers?
12. Do I have to make a deposit to reserve my wedding date? If so, how much is it and can I get a refund if necessary?
13. Do you supply the topper for the cake and is it included in the price?
14. What do you charge extra for?
15. What recommendations can you give me to maximize my budget?
16. Do you offer budget cakes?
17. Do you offer wedding cake packages?
18. Do you have any specials cake offers now or coming up?
19. Are there any additional fees I should be aware of?

Contracts/Legal/Licenses

1. Do you provide a written proposal for me to take home?
2. When will I receive the final contract from you?
3. Can I make changes after I order the cake?
4. Do you charge for changing my wedding cake order?
5. How late can I cancel my order and what is the fee?
6. When do you require payment and the final guest count?
7. What is your refund policy?
8. Can you make the wedding cake and my friend make the groom's cake?
9. Are you licensed by the state?
10. What happens if I'm not happy with the cake?
11. Is there any type of guarantee you offer?

General

1. How do your wedding cakes differ from other Baker/Designers?
2. What should I look for in a cake baker?
3. What should I beware of before I begin shopping for a wedding cake?
4. Can you supply references?

5. How much cake should we order?
6. What size cake is needed to feed all my wedding guests?
7. What is the standard serving size?
8. What is the measurement of your serving of cake?
9. How many tiers of cake do I get for a wedding cake of 200 servings?
10. What size of tiers will I get for my 200 serving cake?
11. Is the top tier of the wedding cake served?
12. Should I freeze the top tier of my wedding cake?
13. How many wedding cakes do you do per weekend?
14. Can I order my cake on-line?
15. How many years have you been making wedding cakes?
16. How long have you been in business?
17. Do you have any suggestions where I can best place my wedding cake?
18. Do you offer wedding cupcakes?
19. Who decorates the cake table?
20. Do you cut the cake?
21. Do you provide a box for the top tier of my wedding cake?
22. Do you only make wedding cakes?
23. Is your bakery a retail location or are you located in a kitchen?
24. Do you offer sheet/kitchen cakes?
25. How long will the cake keep after the reception?
26. Do you rent items like stands, knives, or toppers?
27. Do you charge a security deposit for the equipment you supply with the cake?
28. What else should I know?

Choose the questions you believe are the most helpful and relevant. Then, go to the individual Baker/Designer's websites and see if they have FAQs that answer them. If they don't, call and ask.

32 Bakery Buster Questions Most Bakers Hope And Pray You Don't Ask

Imagine yourself as a judge and your Baker/Designers' answers as your evidence.
Weigh them carefully because the cake artist you choose will be creating...

The most important cake of your life!

1) How many years have you been in business and how many different owners have operated the bakery in the last 6-8 years?

ANSWER

Stability is the key here. You want to make sure the cake shop/bakery will be around when the most important day of your life arrives. There are countless stories of brides that didn't receive their wedding cake because the bakery or person working from their home, a restaurant, or a country club who was supposed to do the wedding cake moved away, became ill, was fired, was not financially strong or simply couldn't keep the doors open for various reasons.

Do you really want to take the chance that the bakery or person creating your wedding cake could leave you high and dry? Order your wedding cake from an existing, established bakery that has demonstrated their ability to be successful and trustworthy. If they have been in business 5-8 years (80% of all businesses fail within 5 years), you can feel pretty comfortable they will be there when your special day arrives.

In my research, while writing *"The Ultimate Bride's Guide for Buying a Wedding Cake,"* I uncovered a couple of horror stories I will share with you to illustrate my point.

In Los Angeles, a well-known gentleman had taken thousands of dollars from brides' initial and full payments for wedding cakes and then disappeared with their money. The gentlemen's shop was a media darling, so of course, you never heard about it on the radio, TV, or in the newspapers. The bottom line was, he had only been open three years before he took off in the night with all their money.

In New Jersey, a very well-known and decorated award-winning veteran of the wedding cake world opened a cake shop and brides flocked to her store to order their dream wedding cakes. Unfortunately, expenses for her business were overwhelming and within 18 months, her business closed leaving around 50 brides high and dry with no chance of recovering their hard-earned money.

2) Do you specialize in cakes, or do you provide a full line of bakery products?

ANSWER

Most bakeries are the in-store grocery type. Some bakeries are a combination of bakery/restaurant, and others offer a full line of donuts, bread, pies, cakes etc.

The final group is your specialty cake bakeries that typically provide only all occasion cakes and wedding cakes. Usually, the final group is made up of real professionals when it comes to creating the best possible wedding cake.

If a bakery makes a full line of products, they are not focused enough on one product line to be great at everything. Typically, wedding cakes are not at the top of their priority list, usually it's bread. The grocery store and full-line bakeries normally offer less when it comes to options and variety in wedding cakes. Also, their quality of product is usually rated as only average. Many grocery stores will package their catering service, flowers, and wedding cake. If you have a limited budget, this could be a good option for you. If you want the most variety and skilled personnel creating your wedding cake, choose a specialty cake shop.

3) Do you have wedding cake information that can be mailed, e-mailed or is posted on your website for me to review?

ANSWER

When you initially contact different B/Ds, they all should be able to mail or e-mail a marketing piece that gives you details about their wedding cakes. The provided information should be detailed enough so you can make an informed decision to at least understand why you would want to visit them or consider using their services to create your wedding cake.

The Internet is a great tool and more bakeries, specialty cake shops and decorators working from their homes are using it to provide photos and information about their artistic wedding cake abilities.

While the Internet is great for research, BEWARE! Anyone can hire a great web designer and copywriter to create a wedding cake store front that makes them look like a million dollars. I caution you to be careful. If their wedding cakes on the Internet has piqued your interest, make an appointment to see them and make sure they live up to their Internet presence.

Keep in mind, if a B/D says they are using the latest techniques to create stunning wedding cakes, shouldn't they have a stunning wedding cake website as well? It only makes sense that if they claim to be on the leading edge of wedding cake design, they should also be technically up to date on the web. If they are not...RUN!

4) How do you price your wedding cakes, by the slice or by the total amount of servings?

ANSWER

This question is more meaningful if your cake is over 150 servings. Here's why. About 85% of B/D's charge by the slice, while 15% charge according to total servings. (Time and material.)

Charging by the slice is a simple way for you to understand pricing and it keeps it simple for the B/D. If you are undecided about getting a cake that serves 75, 100, or 125 servings at \$5 per serving, you can quickly calculate prices of \$375, \$500, or \$625.

If a B/D charges by total servings, the calculation of cost for the same three cakes of 75, 100, or 125 servings could be dramatically different. For example, the cake could start out at \$5 per serving as in the first example, but at 100 servings the price drops to \$4.50 per serving and at 125 servings, the price drops to \$4 per serving. So, 125 servings from this baker for the same cake in the first example would only be \$500 instead of \$625.

Why do their prices drop as the cake gets larger? The reason is, a 150 serving cake does not take twice as long to produce and decorate as a 75 serving cake. They feel time and material is a more reasonable pricing model.

Why do only 15% of the B/Ds charge by total servings? Those 15% believe charging by the slice is "overcharging" their clients. The other 85% say customers understand and prefer the per slice method of pricing. In addition, it is almost impossible to post wedding cakes on the Internet using the by total servings method without completely confusing the prospective bride. You'll have to decide which method makes the most sense for you.

5) Will you give me the names of 3 upcoming brides who I can call after they receive their wedding cakes from you?

ANSWER

This method is better than asking for references or reading testimonials of past brides. You won't have to wonder if you are receiving "baited" recommendations. (With privacy laws being more stringent, some bakers may not wish to accommodate this request.)

6) How much of my deposit (retainer) do I lose if I cancel my wedding cake the day after I order it, 60 days before my wedding or two weeks before

ANSWER

Obviously, no one wants to think about cancelling their wedding cake, just like no one wants to think of the possibility of having a thunderstorm during an outside wedding reception. Nevertheless, it is better to be prepared than be surprised and upset later.

You need to be aware there can be large differences between B/Ds when it comes to deposits (retainers) and payments.

Gather this information from each B/D. Make sure you are familiar with their terms before you make your final decision to pay them a single penny.

7) How can I be sure my wedding cake order has been taken correctly?

ANSWER

Ask them how the order is processed. In other words, what kind of information does the consultant write down on their order form, how do they store their records, and how does the wedding cake artist understand the information?

The B/D should have a systematic approach to their ordering process by which they use a standard format for everyone to understand.

The salespeople, cake artists, and even the delivery driver should all understand the order format thoroughly. Why? So, each one can see if there is a problem and have it corrected before your wedding cake is ever delivered.

My research has shown most problems with your wedding cake begin with the ordering process. So, make sure you get a copy of your order and that you can understand what it says. If it is written in “decorator-ees” have them explain it to you in plain English. In addition, take other necessary steps to make sure you get what you ordered.

8) Ask if the person taking your order is the same person who will decorate your wedding cake?

ANSWER

Many times, the person taking your order will be a salesperson, not a cake decorator. If a cake decorator takes your order, you are probably in a smaller bakery, cake boutique or with a home baker.

You can feel pretty comfortable your cake will be decorated as expected if the owner, wedding cake decorator or a seasoned wedding cake salesperson/consultant helps you.

In any case, make sure the person you are speaking with is knowledgeable about the wedding cakes their business offers. If you feel uncomfortable with the person helping you, ask for someone else or...RUN!

Larger B/Ds, typically, have a good system of taking wedding cake orders. Usually, they have safeguards in place to be sure your order is processed correctly, no matter who takes it.

Just make sure you get the name of the person who took your order. Anytime you need to make a change or add something to your order, ask for them. The more employees you get involved, the more potential you have for mistakes and problems.

9) Do you have a showroom with at least 10-15 actual displays so I can get a feel for your artistic ability, creativity, and skills?

ANSWER

Visit at least 3 B/Ds to see what they have to offer. Ask yourself, do they have enough wedding cake displays for me to feel comfortable with their artistic ability and make me believe they are experts at wedding cakes?

It is very important they have at least 10 wedding cake displays so you can see enough variety to understand they are great at decorating simple to elegant wedding cakes. Be aware, some bakeries only offer selections that are low-end designs and on the other hand some offer only expensive designs. Preferably, they should be able to provide a broad spectrum for every budget.

10) Do you have albums or a website with at least 100 pictures and/or photos of wedding cakes?

It doesn't matter if the bakery shot the photographs or if they are from leading cake decorating publications.

The truth is while most bakeries would love to only show their photographed wedding cakes, the pictures from leading decorating magazines are far superior in photographic quality. The photos from magazines have wonderful clarity of detail with perfect lighting for you to see the wedding cake from an optimal view.

Also, keep this point in mind, do you think a B/D is going to put photos of their worst decorated wedding cakes in albums for you to judge them?

If a B/D has a showroom with wedding cakes that are decorated in a fashion pleasing to your eye, most likely they will do a great job from the photo/pictures in their albums or on their website.

The time to worry is if they don't have at least 10 wedding cake displays for you to see. In that case, their photos from magazines or wedding cake publications could be suspect.

11) Are your wedding cake designs current and up to date? Can you show me?

Some cake boutiques and bakeries don't update their wedding cake designs as often as they should. Wedding cake designs change like women's clothing fashions. Great B/Ds change their wedding cake displays and designs at least once to three times a year to reflect the newest and best "in" wedding cakes.

For example, having your wedding cake stacked instead of separated is still a popular trend. Using rolled fondant has become very popular and continues to dominate modern wedding cake decorations. And third is the continuing surge in "sugar-paste" flowers, versus buttercream, silk, or fresh blooms.

When you are looking for a B/D, consider the cake shops/bakeries that take the time to follow trends and offer the latest look and styles in wedding cakes. If they don't and it appears their designs are still from 2012, I suggest you...RUN!

12) Can I mix and match wedding cake designs or do I have to take it exactly the way I see it in the picture?

ANSWER

Not every bride is satisfied with each bakery's wedding cake selection. You should be able to take designs from different photos to create a wedding cake that is unique and fits and suits your liking. If the B/D doesn't allow you to do that, it usually shows their lack of expertise or their inability to be creative. Again...RUN!

13) Who will decorate my wedding cake if the cake decorator is ill?

ANSWER

Make sure there are at least two cake decorators on staff who actually decorate wedding cakes. Here's why. If one gets sick, is gone on vacation, quits, or for many other reasons, there is still one left that can do a professional job.

You're safer if the cake shop/bakery has 3 or more wedding cake decorators. If you use a small bakery, grocery store, restaurant/bakery, or home decorator, please be aware you're taking a bigger chance.

When I coach a home decorator who designs wedding cakes from their house, or where they are employed such as a country club, or restaurant, one of the first steps I make them take is to find a back-up cake decorator who can fill in for them in their absence. If you are using someone who works on their own, this question is critical.

14) How many decorators do you have on staff who actually decorate wedding cakes?

ANSWER

This requires a slightly different answer than the previous question. Keep in mind, just because a bakery employs 6 cake decorators, don't automatically assume they are all good at decorating wedding cakes. They may be spending the majority of their time decorating all-occasion cakes and cupcakes.

There could be only one or two decorators who actually have the required skills and experience to create your wedding cake. You'll want to know before you place your order.

15) How do you support the tiers to keep my wedding cake from leaning or falling over at my reception?

ANSWER

As an example, if your wedding cake is going to serve 200 guests, it will probably be four tiers high. When the baker/decorator puts the wedding cake together, they use some type of support system to keep the cake from collapsing under its own weight. You need to know how they do it.

As odd as this seems, my research uncovered baker/decorators who only use minimal support or in some cases no support. If the B/D, you speak with seems a little unclear with their explanation...RUN!

Experienced baker/decorators all use systems that keep the wedding cake tiers level and from falling over or collapsing.

Some tier systems are very expensive for the baker/decorator to buy, so you'll have to return them to the shop. Expect to pay some sort of refundable deposit on them.

Other baker/decorators use wooden doll rods, plastic doll rods, or heavy-duty straws. Typically, you won't be asked to bring those back.

16) Are your cakes baked fresh on-site?

ANSWER

This may seem like a strange question, but some bakeries (grocery stores) and country clubs do not bake their own wedding cakes. With labor costs being sky-high and quality assurance issues, some bakeries purchase their cakes through a bakery distributor.

Of course, don't expect a bakery counter clerk to actually admit they buy pre-frozen cakes. They may not even know themselves. It is estimated that around 18% of all bakeries purchase cakes made from a wholesale bakery. I'm not saying a wholesale-baked cake is bad...*OK, maybe they are a choking hazard.* What I mean to say is bakeries that bake their cakes on location usually have a superior product.

17) Do you provide cake samples for me to test?

ANSWER

You should request at least three samples to make sure you like the flavor, the fillings, moistness of the cake, and the flavor of the frosting. Getting sample cakes is commonplace in today's competitive wedding cake environment. If they don't, or worse, won't supply samples...RUN!

18) Do you have at least 15 different cakes flavors to choose from?

ANSWER

Many bakeries don't specialize in wedding cakes, so they don't have the materials or extra space in their shops to bake a broad selection of flavors. It takes considerable extra effort to make at least 15-20 flavors, and only bakeries that really desire to meet their customer's wedding cake needs will carry more than 15 flavors.

Hey, it's your wedding cake; you should be able to get flavor(s) you want. I suggest you find out early in your interview process whether they have a flavor(s) that satisfies you.

19) Do you have at least 15 different fillings to choose from?

ANSWER

This question is closely related to the prior one. However, it is much easier to carry 15 different fillings than it is cakes. Why? Just about every wedding cake B/D buys prepared fillings. Sure, there are a few small B/Ds that make some of their own homemade fillings, but it is definitely the exception. If you call a bakery and they don't even carry 15 different fillings to meet your taste buds delight, they are not very serious about your wants.

You might be thinking to yourself, "It's no big deal if they only make 6 fillings." Very true, but if they only make 6 fillings, 5 flavors of cake and 30 different styles of wedding cake, you should notice a pattern that makes you reconsider your "no-big-deal" position.

20) Do you offer more than one kind of frosting?

ANSWER

A cake shop/bakery should offer more than one type of frosting for your wedding cake. Be aware buttercream is the standard for wedding cakes. It gives your B/D the most decorating options.

If you choose a whipped type, be aware that it can be very messy. And most of the time, you will be very limited in your design.

Buttercream holds up the best, especially in the summer and decorates extremely well all year long.

I've left fondant frosting for last. Fondant frosting makes your wedding cake look as smooth as silk. It gives your wedding cake the best overall visual effect and details made from fondant can look stunning. But let's face it, most fondant, at best, is neutral tasting.

Putting taste aside, let's be honest, it doesn't feel good in your mouth when you eat it. It sort of feels like you are chewing clay.

Please...for those decorators out there reading this, if you think homemade fondant tastes wonderful, then you have been sniffing w-a-y too much powdered sugar.

Even with my critique of fondant, I would still highly recommend using it for the gorgeous appearance it gives your wedding cake. If your guests don't care for it, just tell them to peel or scrape it off.

21) How many wedding cakes do you make per weekend?

ANSWER

This question will help you determine their competency. If they do a minimum of 2-5 wedding cakes per weekend, they probably have a systematic approach to their ordering, baking, decorating, and delivery processes. Those are good things.

If they only do 1 per weekend, it means you should get more personalized service along with a higher price tag. However, keep in mind, you are counting on "one" person to do the baking, decorating and delivery your lifetime memory, make sure they have a good back-up plan as stated in question 14.

22) Do you specialize in any particular wedding cake styles?

ANSWER

This question is designed to help you decide which B/Ds you should visit. Here are 3 reasons to use this question:

1. If you are searching for themed cakes; let's say seascape or country designs, because your reception is on the beach or in a barn.
2. If all the wedding cakes a B/D creates utilizes highly skilled, exotic handcrafted features that are more than you can afford.
3. A B/D only makes low-end, high-volume wedding cakes that are limited in design and flavors, which are meant to be marketed to brides with low to moderate budgets.

23) What are your decorators' qualifications for decorating wedding cakes? How much experience do they have?

ANSWER

Usually, wedding cakes are decorated by seasoned pros that have been decorating for years.

It's the difference between a regular doctor and a brain surgeon. You probably don't want a novice doing your wedding cake. Ask if they have a training program and an internal certification process before they let anyone touch your wedding cake.

The "great" cake boutiques /bakeries have in-house programs that mentor rising wedding cake decorators.

24) Can you decorate my wedding cake to look like a picture I found in a magazine or something that I have designed myself?

ANSWER

"Great" cake boutiques/bakeries can replicate most pictures or photos you bring to them. Keep in mind though, there is a good reason those types of pictures are in the top bridal magazines. They are original and usually expensive—not all of them, just most.

You can expect to pay \$8-\$20 per serving for many of them, versus the typical range of \$3-10. I would recommend going back to the chapter on design to read a more thorough response. Not everything is as simple as it seems.

25) Do you offer delivery and set-up of the cake(s)? Is there a limited delivery area?

ANSWER

Yes, it may seem obvious that all B/Ds would deliver your cake, however, that is not always the case.

First, you need to inquire whether they deliver and then ask how much they charge. Some bakeries say they deliver for free, but of course, it is built into the price of your cake.

The real test is when you ask, “How about if I pick up my wedding cake, how much less will the cake be? If they answer, “We don’t charge for delivery, so there is nothing to discount” ...watch out! This is a complete gimmick. They hope you’ll pick up your wedding cake. It saves them money and leaves you holding the bag.

B/Ds who charge separately have your wallet in mind. If you want to pick it up yourself, you won’t pay for delivery. And, if you want it delivered, you’ll pay between \$25-\$60 in town, and between .75 per mile to 1.50 per mile for out of town, depending on the distance. *(By the way, it usually averages somewhere between \$45-\$75 per hour.)*

Keep in mind, a majority of B/Ds don’t and won’t deliver very far out of town. The wedding cake B/Ds who have first-rate customer service will deliver any day, anywhere, any time.

26) Can you explain how you handle the delivery of my wedding cake?

ANSWER

This question will illustrate the competency of their delivery methodology. Go back and read chapter 9 on wedding cake delivery. If they virtually duplicate what is discussed within the chapter, you can relax. If they don’t, they don’t belong on your “A” list.

Six Awkward Questions You Should Consider Asking

If you want to be prudent...GET the answers

27) How much liability insurance does your business carry?

ANSWER

As stated in the chapter “Secrets,” Secret #18 explains this subject thoroughly. I would recommend a B/D have a minimum policy of one million dollars and up; preferably, two million and up. If they don’t carry any liability insurance...RUN!

(Once again, here’s my disclaimer: I am not a licensed insurance agent in your state or any other state. You should seek the advice of a licensed insurance professional to seek competent help.)

28) Do you have a health department permit or an equivalent permit?

ANSWER

This is very straight forward. You want to make sure they have all the required permits to do business in your locality. If they don’t...RUN! Keep this in mind, you don’t want to be apologizing to your guests for cat hair in your frosting or a cake that smells like cigarette smoke.

29) Is there any pending litigation against your company or any of its owners involving a customer? How many lawsuits has your company been involved with in the last three years?

ANSWER

You can always come up with a reason why a B/D couldn't settle their difference with a customer. One lawsuit every three years is probably acceptable, but that's the limit. If they have two or more lawsuits in a three to five-year period...RUN! It shows another side to their customer service.

CAUTION: If the person you are ordering your wedding cake from isn't organized as a licensed business in your state...RUN! There could be a big difference litigating a person who has organized their cake business under a business structure, versus suing a person or company that doesn't.

(Here's my disclaimer: I am not a licensed attorney in your state or any other state. You should seek the advice of a licensed attorney to seek competent help.)

30) How or where do you store my wedding cake order? (How do you safeguard my order and private information?)

ANSWER

You do not have to make a federal case out of this one, but you do want to feel confident knowing what is happening with your personal information listed on your order form or agreement. For example, if they keep their wedding cake orders in a safe, locked filing cabinet or secured in an office, at least they are using reasonable measures to protect you.

In addition, it's good to know your order is located in a specific place where all the wedding cake orders are kept. This helps eliminate lost orders, limited access by nonessential employees, and allows quick access by essential employees.

31) Who do I contact and what is their phone number if my wedding cake is late or has a problem? What is your after-hours emergency phone number in case there's a problem with my wedding cake?

ANSWER

Most B/Ds do not supply you with a phone number without asking for it. Why? Because they are afraid brides will call them over and over again about the smallest issues...*ruining every Friday and Saturday night for them.*

What they don't understand is, you don't have the time to call them...you're sort of BUSY...unless it's urgent!

Keep in mind, if your cake doesn't look exactly the way you thought it was going to, calling them after your reception begins won't fix the problem. Even if you can get a hold of them, it could take hours to repair the issue.

Your best defense is to follow the advice given in Question 9-8, "How can I make sure the cake is delivered on time or even shows up?"

To discuss minor issues, call them after you get back from your honeymoon.

32) Do you offer a written guarantee with your wedding cakes? What is it?

ANSWER

Most B/Ds do not have a written guarantee (over 98%). The reason is simple. Most small business owners, including bakery, cake boutique owners, and home bakers, believe most brides would ask for some type of refund. They believe it opens a window for the bride to take advantage of them by purposely finding something wrong with their wedding cake.

The real truth is this:

- Studies show that less than 1 in 20 customers will ask for any money back. And only 1 in 33 will attempt to get a full refund.
- A guarantee actually helps the bakery appear more competent and trustworthy.
- Owners of most bakeries are sadly mistaken. When they provide a wedding cake, a client like you assumes there is an implied guarantee anyway. It just comes down to arguing and fighting about it if something does go wrong instead of making it clear up front.

Here's the bottom line, the chances of the B/Ds you interview having a written guarantee are slim. If they do, place them on your A+ list. If they don't, but they are competent in every other way according to the guidance you've received in "*The Ultimate Bride's Guide for Buying a Wedding Cake*," you're probably in good hands.

Questions A Baker Might Ask...*They Don't Teach You At Harvard*

A consummate narrative of antidotal particulars "Bridal Cake Scientists" shall extrapolate for your requisition.

(For those of us who didn't attend Harvard that translates into: A laundry list of questions a baker might ask at your consultation.)

Any language about the "CONTRACT" or "ORDERING AGREEMENT" has been purposely left out. Discussing prices, payment terms, deposits, and other legal issues is not the intention; **It's to help you anticipate what you'll be asked and be prepared for your appointment.**

The list is divided among 5 specific areas:

- 1) Contact information.
- 2) Ordering questions and information for the bride's cake.
- 3) Ordering questions and information for the groom's cake.
- 4) Delivery Information.
- 5) Additional products and services.

1) Air-Tight Contact Information. *This is every key person along with their pertinent contact information to quickly resolve any question, problem or concern that could pop up.*

Date and time of wedding reception.

1. Date of wedding.
2. Day of week.
3. Time reception begins.
4. Time guests will be arriving

Contact information for the bride, groom and one emergency contact.

5. Name of bride.
 - a. Home phone number.
 - b. Home address.
 - c. Cell phone.
 - d. Primary email address.
 - e. Employer.
 - f. Work phone number.
6. Name of groom.
 - a. Home phone number.
 - b. Home address.
 - c. Cell phone.
 - d. Primary email address.
 - e. Employer.
 - f. Work phone number.

7. Name of emergency contact.
 - a. Home phone number.
 - b. Cell phone number.
 - c. Primary email address.

Reception Information. *(Unless you are picking up your cake.)*

8. Name of reception site.
 - a. Address of reception site.
 - b. Phone number.
 - c. Person in charge or your designated contact person.
 - d. Phone number/cell phone number of designated contact person.
 - e. Name of room.
 - f. Time room will be ready for the cake set-up.
 - g. Time cake can be delivered.
 - h. Exact placement of the cake within or outside at reception site.
9. Name of wedding planner.
 - a. Phone number of wedding planner.
 - b. Primary email.
10. Name of florist.
 - a. Phone number of florist.
 - b. Contact person and cell phone number of person doing the reception flowers.
 - c. What time will the florist be arriving.
11. Name of caterer.
 - a. Phone number of caterer.
 - b. Contact person and cell phone number of person managing the reception.
 - c. Time caterer will be arriving.
12. Name of photographer.
 - a. Name of photographer shooting photos.
 - b. Office phone of photographer.
 - c. Cell number of photographer shooting photos.

2) Ordering Information for The Bride's Cake. *Below is a typical list of questions to help you carefully weigh options regarding the size, design, and taste of your cake.*

1. Would you like to **“place your order today?”**
2. Would you like to **“reserve a date”** with a nonrefundable deposit, but order later?
3. What is or have you thought about a **“budget”** for the bride's cake?
4. Have you considered which **“shape(s)”** (*round, square, heart etc.*) you would like to incorporate?
5. Do you want to have a certain **“number of tiers”** for your cake?
6. Do you want **“side cakes”** to your main bride's cake?
7. Have you considered **“cupcakes”** in place of a traditional tiered wedding cake?
8. To add height or a sense of having a larger cake by **“adding dummy cakes”** in place of real cake for some of the tiers (*Styrofoam type*) appeal to you?

9. Would you like to have extra cake sometimes called **“kitchen cake”** to be served in addition to the bride’s cake?
10. Have you thought about which **“cake flavors”** you would like?
11. Are there **“dietary considerations”** such as needing a cake that will not contain Milk, Eggs, Peanuts, Tree nuts, Soy, Gluten, Processed Sugar or is Kosher or Vegan.
12. Would you like to have **“fillings”** in your cake?
13. Would you like to use **“white frosting to cover the cake,”** a single color like ivory or light blue to cover the cake, or a combination of colors?
14. Have you considered your options when it comes to the **“type of frosting(s)”**?
15. Have you searched for **“bridal cake photos on the Internet?”**
16. Do you have **“photos with you?”**
17. What **“elements”** (decorations) do you like from the photos you have selected?
18. Do you have a cake design **“sketched”** for me to see?
19. What type of **“personality”** do you have? (*Serious, fun-loving, adventurous*)
20. What sense of **“style”** do you have? (*Elegant, traditional, modern*)
21. Would you like the cake’s decoration to fit well with the **“reception site’s physical location?”**
22. Would like the cake’s decoration to work with the **“design and decorating of the reception room?”**
23. Would you like the cake to work with the **“ambience”** which you have created for your reception?
24. Would like to design the cake around your **“wedding dress?”**
25. Do you want the cake decorated in a **“theme?”** (*Beach, western, Mickey and Mini Mouse, Snow skiing, your honeymoon destination etc.*)
26. Are you interested in a traditional **“ethnic”** wedding cake?
27. Name or **“number of bride’s cake?”** (*If you are choosing a cake from the B/D.*)
28. Have you considered using **“tier separators”** or would you like it **“stacked?”**
29. Do you have **“swatches to match the colors”** designated for decoration on your cake?
30. Are you considering using **“ribbon”** on the cake?
31. Are you considering using **“bows”** on the cake?
32. Do you have idea for the **“type of flowers”** you want to use on the cake, if any. And which types? (*Fresh, silk, buttercream, fondant, gum paste etc.*)
33. Have you made a decision for the **“topper”** of the wedding cake. (*Flowers, monograms, ornament etc.*)
34. Are you considering using **“fruit”** as part of your decoration?
35. Have you thought about using a **“platform”** for your cake? (*It goes underneath your entire wedding cake to raise it off the table and add an additional design feature to your cake appear taller.*)
36. Would you like for us to place the **“fresh flowers and greens”** on and around the cake or will the florist perform the service?

3) Ordering Information for The Groom’s Cake.

1. Have you thought about a **“budget”** for the groom’s cake?
2. Have you searched for **“photos on the Internet?”**
3. Do you have **“photos with you?”**
4. Name or **“number of groom’s cake?”** (If you are choosing a cake from the B/D.)
5. Number of **“servings?”**
6. Have you thought about which **“cake flavor(s)”** you would like?
7. Would you like to have a **“filling(s)”** in your cake?
8. Have you thought about the **“type of frosting?”**
9. Would you like to have a sheet cake, round cake, tiered cake, shaped cake, or 3-D cake?

10. What are the groom's **"favorite activities, hobbies, special interests or job"** to consider as a theme or decoration for the cake?

4.) **Delivery**

1. What time does your reception begin?
2. What time will guests begin arriving?
3. What time will the room be set-up?
4. Which room or what is the name of the room?
5. What time is the florist arriving?
6. What time will the caterer be arriving?
7. Where will the cake be placed?
8. What is the name of the contact person at the reception site? What is their cell phone number?
9. Who in the bridal party is the emergency contact person in the event of a problem? What is their cell phone number?
10. Are there any special instructions for the delivery? Such as: *enter through the south doors, call before delivering, place cake in walk-in cooler, flowers will be at reception site to place on cake.*

5.) **Ordering Information for Other Products and Services.**

1. Have you considered a cake topper such as **"monogram initials"** or **"glass ornament?"**
2. Would you like for us to provide **"cake cutting services?"**
3. Would you like for us to provide **"cake serving set?"**
4. Would you like for us to provide **"mints?"**
5. Would you like for us to provide **"nuts?"**
6. Are you going to freeze the top tier of your cake, or would you like to **"order a fresh cake"** for your one-year anniversary?
7. Would you like to have a **"special cake box"** to freeze the top tier of your wedding cake?
8. Would you like to have **"mini cake bags or boxes"** for individual take-home pieces?
9. Would you like for us to provide **"custom wedding cookies?"**
10. Would you like **"chocolate covered strawberries?"**
11. Would you like any other **"pastry items?"** (*Cheesecakes, bars, cream puffs etc.*)
12. Can we provide any **"other bakery products"** for your reception?
13. Are you interested in our **"floral services?"**
14. Are you interested in **"catering services?"**
15. Are you interested in **"wedding invitations?"**
16. Are you interested in **"wedding favors?"**
17. Are you interested in **"balloons?"**
18. Are you interested in having us **"decorate your cake table(s)?"**
19. Are you interested in having us **"decorate your reception room?"**
20. Are you interested in having a **"punch fountain?"**
21. Are you interested in a **"chocolate fountain?"**
22. Have you thought of renting a **"photo booth?"**

Is your head spinning yet? Relax. Nobody will ask all these questions. On the practical side, you'll be very prepared and confident to discuss your wedding cake wants and desires!

Kiss Your Wedding Cake Delivery Worries Away

A safety-net so your wedding cake shows up on time and in one piece

(Give copies to your caterer, florist, reception site, contact person and anyone else who should have delivery information.)

Name of
BRIDE & GROOM: _____

DATE OF RECEPTION: _____ DAY OF WEEK: _____

TIME OF CAKE DELIVERY: _____ AM _____ PM

Name of reception site: _____

Address: _____

City and State: _____

Where in the building, which floor, which room, name of room, does the cake go?

Special Instructions:

Name of bakery/designer: _____

Phone number of bakery manager and/or designer: _____

If the cake is not on time, who to call, their phone number and cell number.

If the cake has a major problem, who to call, their phone number and cell number.

What items is the bakery delivering: wedding cake, groom's cake(s), cake platform, wedding cake topper, flowers, mints, nuts, cookies, favours.

Other items:

Sizing and Placement Information

<p>Here's the base diameters of the bride's cake(s).</p> <p>Main bride's cake</p> <p>Shape</p> <p>Size (in inches)</p> <p>Side cakes:</p> <p>Shape</p>	<p>Here's the base diameters of the groom's cake(s).</p> <p>Groom's cake</p> <p>Shape:</p> <p>Size (in inches)</p> <p>:</p>
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Attention reception site Manager, we recommend the following table sizes

Please list size and shape of table(s).

Circle one	Circle one	Diagram <u>placement</u> of cake(s) on table(s).
Bride's cake Centered	Groom's Centered	
Bride's cake Offset	Groom's Offset	
Bride's cake Right side	Groom's Right side	
Bride's cake Left side	Groom's Left side	

A Second Grader's Guide to Cutting A Wedding Cake

Serving

Before serving your wedding cake, remove the top tier, which should be saved for your first anniversary.

Begin by cutting the 2nd tier, followed by the 3rd, 4th, and so on.

If your wedding cake consists of different flavors of tiers, remove the top tier and save. Then, separate each tier and place them on the table. Slice pieces from each tier to offer guests a flavor of their choice.

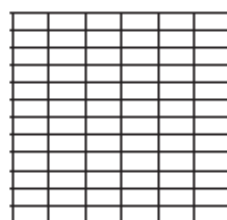
Cutting

The diagrams below will give you a general plan for cutting the six most common wedding cake shapes.

The diagrams illustrate a tier of wedding cake 4-6 in. tall cut into 1 x 2 in. slices.

If your tiers are less than 3 in. tall, cut them into 1 x 3 in. slices. This keeps your slices proportional to the 4 in. 1 x 2 pieces. Keep in mind, your cake will yield 1/3rd less servings.

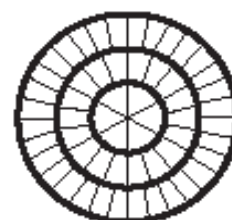
PAN SHAPE	SIZE	NUMBER SERVINGS WEDDING
Round	6 in.	12
	8 in.	24
	9 in.	32
	10 in.	38
	12 in.	56
	14 in.	78
	16 in.	100
Square	6 in.	18
	8 in.	32
	10 in.	50
	12 in.	72
	14 in.	98
	16 in.	128
Heart	6 in.	14
	8 in.	22
	9 in.	28
	10 in.	38
	12 in.	56
	14 in.	72
	15 in.	74
Petal	6 in.	8
	9 in.	18
	12 in.	40
	15 in.	64
Hexagon	6 in.	12
	9 in.	26
	12 in.	40
	15 in.	70
Oval	7 3/4 x 5 5/8 in.	13
	10 3/4 x 7 7/8 in.	26
	13 1/2 x 9 7/8 in.	45
	16 1/2 x 12 3/8 in.	70



12 in.

Square Tiers:

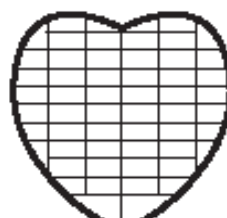
Move in 2 in. from the outer edge and cut vertically, top to bottom. Slice and serve 1 in. pieces of cake. Now move in another 2 in. and repeat process until entire tier is cut.



12 in.

Round Tiers:

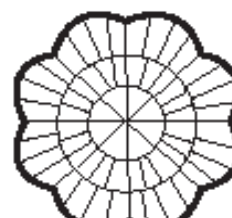
Move in 2 in. from the tier's outer edge and cut a circle. Slice and serve 1 in. pieces from around the circle. Now move in another 2 in. and cut another circle. Repeat process until the tier is completely cut. The center core of each tier and the small top tier can be cut into 4ths, 6ths or more, depending on size.



12 in.

Heart Tiers:

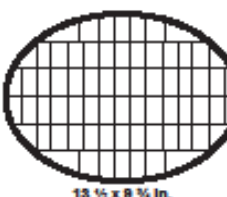
Divide the tiers vertically into 2 in. wide rows. Within rows, slice and serve 1 in. pieces of cake.



16 in.

Petal Tiers:

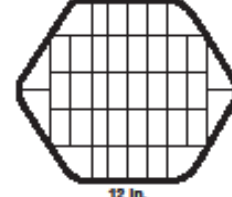
Cut similar to round tiers as diagram shows.



13 1/2 x 9 7/8 in.

Oval Tiers:

Move in 2 in. from the outer edge and cut across. Slice and serve 1 in. pieces of cake. Now move in another 2 in. repeat process until the entire tier is cut.



12 in.

Hexagon Tiers:

Move in 2 in. from the outer edge and cut across. Slice and serve 1 in. pieces of cake. Now move in another 2 in., repeat process until the entire tier is cut.

1st Anniversary Survival Guide

How to Make Sure the Top Tier of Your Wedding Cake Survives In the Deep Freeze for One Year

These instructions are a combination of proven ideas from 63 Baker/Designers.

After receiving feedback from 1481 brides, 1279 reported the cake being unbelievable good.

Instructions for freezing:

1. Have your Baker/Designer supply a take home container (*box*) for the top tier of your wedding cake.
2. Assign someone from your wedding party, family, or friend to take the top tier of wedding cake home with them. Have them place it in a freezer as is.
3. After the cake has been in the freezer for 4-6 hours or overnight, take the cake out of the box and cover the entire cake with any brand of plastic shrink-wrap.
4. Then, immediately place the wrapped cake in a freezer bag. Most grocery stores carry a 1 or 2-gallon freezer bags. A freezer bag will give you the best chance of preventing freezer burn.
5. Go to your department or discount store and buy a plastic container (*Tupperware type*) large enough to fit the cake and freezer bag. Be sure the lid is tight.
6. Place the container in a chest type freezer or your standard upright refrigerator freezer. The key is to place the container toward the bottom of a chest freezer or the back of a standard upright refrigerator freezer. (*This helps minimize the harmful effects from the defrost cycles*)
7. Do not take the cake out of the freezer for a full year. (*If you let it unthaw even a little you run the risk of the cake deteriorating*)

Instructions for thawing:

1. Two days prior to eating the cake, reverse the entire covering process until you pull the shrink-wrap off the frozen cake.
 2. Take three sheets of paper towels and place them on the inside bottom of the plastic container.
 3. Place the cake back into the covered container and place it in the refrigerator.
 4. After two days, take the cake out of the refrigerator, leaving it in the container, and place on counter for 1 hour to 2 hours. (*Cakes typically taste better at room temperature.*)
 5. Eat and enjoy!
- ❖ Yes, it can take up to 2 days for your cake to thaw out. You want to thaw it slowly.
 - ❖ Do not thaw at room temperature.
 - ❖ Following the above process will keep the cake's decoration in perfect condition.
 - ❖ Some fillings do not freeze well. Check with your Baker/Designer.
 - ❖ **If you turn out to be one of the unlucky 25% where these instructions do not work, call your B/D, and arrange for a fresh cake.**
 - ❖ Want something extra special? *Have your photographer or a friend take a photo of the top tier of your wedding cake. Then, on your first anniversary, take it to your Baker/Designer to decorate a duplicate.*

Survey Results: *"Share Your Thoughts and Opinions About Shopping for A Wedding Cake"* at WeddingCake.org

These are the results from 104,855 brides from June 29, 2017, through Sept 5, 2021. To access the entire survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TheUltimateBridesGuide>

The survey gauges how brides feel about common problems with wedding cakes.

1. Below, in random order, are the 15 most common concerns brides have for buying a wedding cake. Tell me how you feel about each one of the issues.

	I am very concerned about this.	I am somewhat concerned about this.	I am a little anxious.	It's not really that big of a deal.	Who cares?
1. I don't really know the first thing about choosing a bakery. I'm worried I'll choose the wrong one, even though they came highly recommended.	62,136	14,619	14,104	11,838	2,158
2. The cake artist I'm thinking about using has owned her own cake shop for less than 2 years. Is that long enough to show me she is reputable and trustworthy?	23,558	14,568	56,369	8,409	1951
3. Even though I had a "taste testing," I'm still apprehensive about my cake being dry and the frosting tasting greasy or extremely sweet.	10,875	11,688	43,719	22,933	15,640
4. I am using someone decorating out of their home. Should I worry about having cat or dog hair in my cake or frosting if they have pets?	68,153	12,666	16,468	6309	1259

5. If the delivery person smokes, do I have to be concerned that my cake will taste like cigarette smoke?	72,443	17,259	8,694	5455	1004
6. I'm not sure if the person I'm using is "state licensed" or whether they have a "health department" permit to bake goods.	58,933	12,699	10,830	14,586	7,807
7. To be honest, I'm stressing about my wedding cake showing up late or worse, not even showing up.	93,414	9,526	933	922	60
8. It makes me a little worried the cake artist I'm using is the only decorator at the store. Do I need to be concerned about who's going to do my cake if she is sick or gone for some other reason.	78,505	11,883	8,997	5,328	142
9. I'm fearful of paying too much or being overcharged because I don't really understand how wedding cakes are priced.	46,938	34,589	18,265	3,015	2,048
10. Although my cake designer drew a pretty good sketch of my unique design, I'm pretty apprehensive about it.	11,688	22,306	51,116	12,215	7530
11. Although I love the way "rolled fondant" looks, be honest, will my guests like it?	61,361	13,614	6,852	14,269	8,759
12. My best friend had a cake that was supposed to serve 250, but she ran out. I would be totally embarrassed.	49,515	23,974	17,698	12,874	794

13. I am concerned the colors on my cake won't match the swatches of material I brought in.	37,763	36,158	23,863	3,260	3811
14. I'm afraid my baker will misplace or lose my wedding cake order.	94,228	6,241	3197	1,189	0
15. One of my friend's wedding cakes had a problem." When they called the bakery, they were already closed for the day. They couldn't get a hold of anyone to fix it.	61,753	24,535	12,598	4929	1040

2. Below is a list of the 15 most common problems brides have with their wedding cakes. (They are in random order.) Please tell me how you would react to any of these problems if they happened to you.

	I'll be upset and demand some or all of my money back.	I'll be embarrassed and want some compensation.	I won't be too happy, but I won't ask for anything.	They probably did the best they could. It doesn't really bother me.
1. The design on my cake was not the one I chose.	92,116	11,898	821	20
2. The cake had a big crack in it and looked as if it was ready to fall apart.	87,184	10,751	6,316	604
3. The colors on my cake did not at all match the swatches I brought in.	16,047	79,918	8,287	603
4. My cake arrived 1 hour after the reception began.	91,046	9,489	3,342	978
5. My cake was leaning so bad, I thought we would be scraping it off the floor.	82,623	15,754	6,336	142
6. My cake was dry. The sample was better.	27,367	68,821	5,623	3,044

7. My frosting was way too thick, and it was crusty.	11,976	44,601	40,275	8,003
8. The layers of cake were very thin. They were not as thick as in the picture.	19,662	59,347	16,099	9,747
9. The fillings in the cake were either the wrong ones or they were so paper thin, you could hardly taste them.	38,606	37,661	19,969	8,619
10. The cake did not serve what I paid for.	77,123	20,908	6,324	500
11. The rolled fondant was heavy, chewy, and did not taste very good.	19,032	70,721	8,628	6,474
12. The cake artist I worked with turned out to be unapologetic about returning my phone calls or making necessary changes to my order.	69,465	17,539	11,345	6,506
13. I got a wedding cake, but it wasn't mine. It was someone else's.	103,993	816	46	0
14. I called two weeks before my wedding and they said everything was on schedule. But then I didn't get my cake. In fact, they couldn't even find my order.	104,291	543	21	0
15. My cake was gorgeous, but when I tried to cut the first piece for our wedding cake photo it was still frozen. We couldn't serve it.	83,412	17,958	2,483	1,002

Short And Sweet Instructions for Buying a Wedding Cake

All 183 pages of the guidebook have been condensed and synthesized into this easy-to-use road map. Print a copy for each of the baker/designers you plan to visit.

In 7-steps, you'll know how to choose a competent and reliable baker, walk through the ordering process, and how-to follow-up to make sure your wedding cake is everything you expected.

Step 1: Understand your purchasing personality profile

This will help you understand your “**emotional value**” and how much of your budget you'll set aside for your cake. If you're not sure what this means, read Question 5-2 (page 63) for an explanation.

- 1) **Simple:** You'll probably set-aside a small amount of your budget.
- 2) **Selective:** In all probability, you will set-aside an average amount.
- 3) **Complex:** You will almost certainly set-aside more than the average bride-to-be.
- 4) **Unique:** You will set-aside the most.

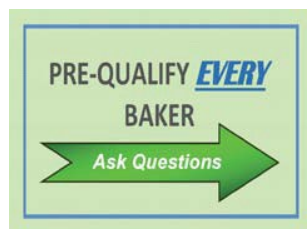
Step 2: Determine which type of Baker/Designer you will be visiting

Remember, you need to compare apples to apples...for pricing, quality, and budgeting purposes. If you're not clear about this topic, read Question 1-2 (page 28).

- 1) **Grocery store bakery.**
- 2) **Retail Bakery.**
- 3) **Specialty cake shop, cake boutique, or a cakery.**
- 4) **Home decorator.**

Step 3: Pre-Appointment planning

This is where you get to act like a Madison Avenue executive doing an interview to hire the best candidate for the job...*the job of creating your wedding cake.*



Begin by “*pre-qualifying*” the bakers you're considering. This method helps you identify bakers who can meet your needs, and weeds-out those who don't.

As brides point out to us, “*Does it make sense to schedule a consultation with someone you probably won't use?*”

For example, if you've set aside \$500 for a one hundred serving wedding cake, would it make sense to schedule an appointment with a Baker/Designer who begins their prices at \$750?

Please refer to “**129 Power-Shopping Questions**” found in the Appendix for both “*Pre-Appointment Planning*” and “*Interview Questions to Ask at Your Appointment.*”

10 “Pre-Appointment” questions brides say helped them the most!

1) My wedding date is _____, are you available?

YES or NO

2) How far in advance of my wedding date should I schedule a consultation? How soon do I need to order my wedding cake?

3) What should I bring to my consultation?

4) How much is your retainer (deposit) to place my order, and can I get a refund if necessary?

5) Can you give me a starting price for (e.g.,100) servings: _____, a midrange price for (e.g.100) servings: _____ and a top-end price for (e.g. 100) servings: _____?

Do you charge by the slice or by time and material? (Circle answer.)

6) Are you willing to recreate wedding cake designs from the web and magazine photos? Do you only create original wedding cakes?

YES or NO

YES or NO

7) What flavors of cakes and fillings do you offer? Of those, which are the most popular?

(Most popular flavors.)

8) Do I order samples of flavors I prefer, or do you present a sample platter?

My Preference - Sample Platter - Both

9) Are you able to deliver to my venue, which is _____ and how much will it cost?

YES or NO

10) How do your wedding cakes differ from other Baker/Designers?

11) Add your own question(s) from the 129 Power-Shopping Questions in the appendix.

After you've selected your questions, call the B/Ds who passed the pre-appointment screening and say, ***“Hi, my name is _____ and I’m interested in getting a wedding cake from you. Do you have a minute to answer some questions?”***

If they give you the responses you’re looking for, make an appointment. If they don’t, I think you know what to do...

Fill in the name(s) of the B/Ds/cake artists you've scheduled consultations within the box below.

My consultation date: _____

Name of Baker/Designer: _____

Name of person I’ll be meeting with: _____

Phone number: _____

Notes:

Step 4: Appointment preparation planning



Planning for your consultation helps both you and the B/D get the most from your appointment. (*Most B/Ds schedule one-hour consultations.*) As well as being a well-informed bride, your bakers will “L-O-V-E” you for being prepared.

Instead of going over 100 things you could do prior to your appointments, here are the top-ten suggestions according to 5500 brides we surveyed and interviewed.

10 Topics to Jump-Start Your Appointment

Budget?

1) **Have an estimate for your cake budget.**

When you let your B/D know what funds you’ve set-aside for your wedding cake, they can steer you toward choosing designs that meet your criteria. If you’re not sure, read chapter five for some assistance.

Guest count?

2) **Have a rough number for your guest count.**

While this might sound like an obvious statement, bakers tell us many brides don’t have a good estimate when they arrive for their consultation. Here’s a simple formula if you’re not sure. Take your entire guest list and multiple it by 70%.

(NOTATION: Many designs are created by the number of tiers and the size of the tiers of cake. If you supply the number of guests the cake needs to serve, your B/D can tell you which of their designs, or designs you’re bringing from the web, or photos will work.)

Cake flavors?

3) **Think about your cake flavors.**

While most bakers will offer or suggest sample cake flavors to assist in your decision, consider asking your closest friends, family and co-workers for cake flavors they enjoy. Then, ask your B/D if they can make those particular flavors. Also, take a look at a few of your favorite cookbooks or consider favorite flavors from your childhood or a neighborhood restaurant.

Frosting type?

4) **Give some thought to the type of frosting.**

Bakers are telling us; buttercream frosting is still the predominant choice of brides. However, we are finding more cake artists who use fondant to cover 100% of all their wedding cakes. If you don’t care for the taste or feel of fondant, you’ll want to share that with your B/D. Besides “*buttercream and rolled fondant*,” there are a multitude of other types of “*sugar-pastes*” and “*chocolates*” to cover your cake, and for making decorations. It would be a good idea to ask your B/D for your options. Be aware, the type(s) of frosting or “*sugar-paste*” on your cake will affect the price of your cake and design.

Bring images
or photos?

5) Consider bringing pictures from the Internet or magazines.

While every B/D will have their own collection of wedding cake photos, you might like what you found on Google images or Pinterest better. Ask them if they can recreate the wedding cake pictures and how much they will cost?

Inspirations?

6) Reflect on inspirations for the design of your cake. For example:

- ☐ The ambience and architecture of the room or facility of the venue.
- ☐ The pattern or design in your wedding dress.
- ☐ Your wedding invitation.
- ☐ The location of your honeymoon.
- ☐ Your favorite flower(s) or flowers you're using in your wedding.
- ☐ Yours and his hobbies or special interests.
- ☐ Seasonal influences. (e.g., Winter)
- ☐ Location influences. (e.g., The beach)
- ☐ Heritages or ethnic influences
- ☐ Paintings or pieces of art.

Shapes of
the tiers?

7) Take into account the shapes of the tiers.

Many brides don't take into account the shape of their wedding cake while looking for designs. Consider shapes like teardrops, petal shaped, hexagon or multiple layered tiered cakes. These are often overlooked and could be appealing to you. Ask your B/D what they offer.

Colors?

8) Bring the chosen colors for your wedding.

Some B/Ds don't care if you bring your colors to the initial consultation. Other B/Ds feel the colors you're using helps them determine your personality and flair, so they can design a cake including these colors. Whichever material you bring, be prepared to leave a sample for every B/D you have an appointment with.

Flowers?

9) Consider your flowers, such as fresh, silk, sugar-paste, or none at all.

Most cake designs utilize some type of flowers, while others don't have a flower on them. Most of the time your designer can exchange one flower for another. For example, a photo could have sugar-paste flowers on it and replacing them with silk or fresh flowers could dramatically lower the price of the cake.

10) Think about getting a groom's cake.

Brides who order a groom's cake are growing by leaps and bounds. Groom's cakes have gone from a boring chocolate cake to wild and crazy shapes and themes. If you are looking to spice-up the cake table, you'll want to think about getting one.

Step 5: Questions a baker might ask at your consultation:



Our extensive 4-page list in the Appendix titled "*Questions a baker might ask; they don't teach at Harvard*" gives you the opportunity to see what you'll need to know and...*what you may want to know more about.*

Below are the most common questions bakers will ask to understand your needs.

The list is divided among 5 specific areas:

- 1) Contact information.
 - 2) Ordering questions and information for the bride's cake.
 - 3) Ordering questions and information for the groom's cake.
 - 4) Delivery Information.)
 - 5) Additional products and services.
-

1) Contact Information.

a) All Your contact information.

b) Date and time of wedding reception.

1. Date of wedding.
2. Time reception begins.

c) Reception Information. (*Unless you are picking up your cake.*)

3. Name of reception site.
 - a. Address of reception site.
 - b. Person in charge or your designated contact person and cell phone number.
 - c. Time cake can be delivered.
4. Name of wedding planner. (*If you have one.*)
 - a. Phone number of wedding planner.
5. Name of florist.
 - a. Phone number of florist.
 - b. Contact person and cell phone number of person doing the reception flowers.
 - c. What time will the florist be arriving.
6. Name of caterer. (*If you are using an outside caterer.*)
 - a. Phone number of caterer.
 - b. Contact person and cell phone number of person managing the reception.
 - c. Time caterer will be setting up the room.

2) Ordering Information for The Bride's Cake.

1. What is, or have you thought about a "budget" for the bride's cake?
2. Have you thought about which "cake flavors" you would like?
3. Did you bring "photos with you?"
4. Have you thought about a "design?"
5. Do you have "swatches to match the colors" designated for decoration on your cake?
6. Have you made a decision for the "topper" of the cake? (*Flowers, monograms etc.*),

3) **Ordering Information for The Groom's Cake.**

1. Have you thought about a **"budget"** for the groom's cake?
2. Number of **"servings?"**
3. Have you thought about which **"cake flavor(s)"** you would like?
4. What are the groom's **"favorite activities, sports, hobbies, special interests or job"** to consider as a theme or decoration for the cake?

4.) **Delivery**

1. What time does your reception begin?
2. What time will the room be set-up?
3. Who in the bridal party is the emergency contact person in the event of a problem?
What is their cell phone number?
4. Are there any special instructions for the delivery?

Step 6: Interview questions to ask your Baker/Designer

Before we dive into your questions, most brides want to feel comfortable with the B/D they choose.

Look for these 5 "likable" traits.

- 1) Honesty and Trust
- 2) Artistic, Creative and Knowledgeable
- 3) Caring
- 4) Organized
- 5) Responsive

The 3 "hurdles" that should make you...*RUN!*

- 1) Extreme Arrogance
- 2) Disorganized
- 3) Over-inflated self-confidence

Your interview questions are divided into 6 groups: These questions are recommendations from professional Baker/Designers/cake artists.

☐ **Wedding Cake Designs**

1. Do you create custom cakes, or do I choose one of the cakes from your portfolio?
2. I am going to have an outdoor reception. How will that affect my cake options?
3. What kind of training or experience do you have decorating wedding cakes?

☐ **Baking/Flavors/Frostings**

1. What are your specialties?
2. Do you make wedding cakes with dietary restrictions?
3. What types of frostings do you commonly use?

☐ **Delivery/Pick-up**

1. Do you deliver and set-up the cake?
2. Which times of day do you deliver wedding cakes?
3. Can the delivery person repair my cake if it is damaged during delivery?
4. How do I transport my wedding cake?

☐ **General**

1. What size cake is needed to feed all my wedding guests?
2. What is the size (length and width) of your slice of cake?
3. How many wedding cakes do you create per weekend?
4. How long have you been in business?

☐ **Pricing**

1. Do you have a minimum order in terms of servings and price for your wedding cakes?
2. Can you quote the price of a wedding cake I saw on your website over the phone?
3. Can you give me a price estimate via email if I email you a photo?
4. Are there any additional fees I should be aware of?

☐ **Contracts/Legal/Licenses**

1. Are you licensed by the state and carry liability insurance?
2. Can I make changes after I place my order? If so, is there a fee?
3. When do you require final guest count and payment?
4. Do you offer any type of guarantee?

Please refer to the "129 Power-Shopping Questions" found in the Appendix. Use it for additional "Interview Questions to Ask Your Baker/Designer." Choose questions that are important, relevant or have special meaning to you.

Step 7: Following-up: Your insurance policy

You might be thinking, *"After I place my order, why do I need to follow-up with my B/D?"*

Look at it like this:

- ☐ Does your hair stylist do an outstanding job on your hair *"every time?"*
- ☐ Have you ever had a pizza that *"wasn't as good"* as they usually make it?
- ☐ Do you know anyone who has never made a mistake? *(Besides you, of course.)*

Sometimes, things just happen! Following-up is simply a prudent action. We found the best items to double-check are the ones brides typically worry about the most.

They can be grouped into 3 categories.

1. Your final order.
2. The design of your cake.
3. The delivery.

1. **YOUR FINAL ORDER.**

How can I make sure they didn't lose my order and the wedding cake gets made?

About a week in advance of your reception, call and ask if there are any final questions or issues that need to be discussed and if everything is on track. If you are very concerned, call again two days in advance and ask the same questions.

2. **THE DESIGN OF YOUR CAKE**

How do I know:

- ☐ If they'll do the right design on my cake?
- ☐ If it is decorated with the right color(s)?
- ☐ If it will have the correct number of tiers?
- ☐ If it will be the correct shape?

All of these concerns can be alleviated by asking if you can see the cake the day before or the same morning prior to delivery. Or, have your B/D take a photo on their cell phone and text it to you.

3. **THE DELIVERY**

How will I know:

- ☐ If the wedding cake will be delivered on time?
- ☐ If the cake will be damaged during delivery?
- ☐ If they'll deliver someone else's cake instead of mine?

Get the cell phone number of the person ACTUALLY delivering your cake.

Then, designate someone from your party as a "*contact person*," to be in charge of accepting the cake. Give them the B/Ds phone number and the phone number of the person delivering the cake. Then have your "*contact person*" follow through with one of the following:

- ☐ Meet the delivery driver of your cake at the reception or have your "*contact person*" go the reception site shortly after the arranged time of delivery to make sure it arrived or
- ☐ Give the phone number of your "*contact person*" to the caterer, wedding planner, or whoever is in charge of the reception site. Tell them you would appreciate a call to your "*contact person*" after the cake arrives or
- ☐ **Have your B/D call your "contact person" as soon as the cake has been delivered and set up to let them know everything went fine.**

If for some reason the person who is supposed to call your contact person doesn't call, make sure your contact person calls them.

Well, there you have it. The largest amount of information ever collected from brides and bakers fused into a winning blueprint to achieve wedding cake bliss.

May your journey be filled with joy, excitement, and knowing you'll choose the best baker for the best value, while receiving the picture-perfect wedding cake.

About Author Ed Otto



Ed Otto, born in the Netherlands, is currently a resident of Omaha, Nebraska.

After graduating from the Oklahoma State Institute of Technology, he teamed up with his European trained Master Baker father to operate a full-line bakery known as “Westgate Bakery” from 1974 until his father’s retirement in 1982. In 1990, Mr. Otto renamed the bakery “The Cake Gallery” and became fully committed to decorated cakes.

His innovative cake decorating abilities have allowed him to bake and decorate cakes for 3 US Presidents and cakes that have flown as far as London. He has decorated cakes for movie stars, rock stars, Senators, and a billionaire.

His cakes have been displayed in magazines, newspapers and on TV. In addition, he has been interviewed on radio and appeared on television numerous times for his wedding cake expertise. He is widely recognized and known for his colorful trademark tattoos worn on the right sleeves of his pastry jackets and as “*The Cake Maniac*.”

Over the course of the last 40+ years, he has personally decorated or managed the oversight of 20,000 wedding cakes.

His “hands-on” working in the trenches has allowed him to write this ground-breaking book and create the first set of business practices and quality standards for the wedding cake industry.

Heading through 2022, Mr. Otto continues to conduct research with brides to keep this guide up-to-date and cutting-edge.

He has also developed a comprehensive course to teach wedding cake Baker/Designers the new rules for providing a “*superior wedding cake buying experience, based on the research with 350,000 brides.*”

The training is based on what today’s millennial and Gen Z brides actually want and expect instead of how Baker/Designers think they should be helping brides.

Until every baker in the country implements the practices and standards brides want and expect, he hopes this guidebook offers you the peace of mind you’re looking for and a wonderful wedding buying cake experience.

Have questions or want to utilize Ed’s expertise, call or text: 402-968-2758 or email: ed@WeddingCake.org.