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When just going to the chapel won't do

In Austin, eco-conscious weddings are becoming the norm

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Austinites are known for being creative and doing things their own way, so it's no surprise that Central Texas brides endeavor to make their weddings one-of-a-kind affairs crammed with personality — and sometimes even snow. Customization and special effects, such as gently cascading flakes of the white stuff, were just two of many trends presented during the recent Austin Wedding and Event Coordinators' luncheon.

This year, members of the nonprofit professional development group, as well as some of their tried-and-true vendors, discussed everything from recycled dresses to monogram designs.

Despite the looming recession, Denise Silverman, owner of Soiree Event Production, said that she and her peers haven't seen a decline in

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business, though their clients' budgets are getting slightly smaller. That said, if determined, even a budget-conscious bride can find ways to create an unforgettable day.

Jessica Moore of Something to Celebrate has coordinated carnival themes, complete with cotton candy and cigar rollers, plus special effects, including the above-mentioned snow, lighting and fireworks.

"They want everything made-to-order and unique," Moore said.

Monograms are now being turned into the couple's logo and are attached to everything from the stationery and favors to the ice sculpture.

For those with more to spend, pre-wedding cocktail hours, which are popular on the coasts, are just starting to hit here in Austin. Silverman said it can be simple — 30 to 45 minutes with a couple of specialty drinks and a few passed hors d'oeuvres — or blown out — 60 to 90 minutes with a stocked bar and a veritable feast with overflowing shrimp cocktail stations, made-to-order pasta and creative sushi rolls. All before the bride walks down the aisle.

"The idea is to give the guests a cocktail and a few bites before they sit down for the wedding ceremony," Silverman said. "This way, their stomachs are not grumbling and they're not antsy during the ceremony."

During the past few years, sustainable weddings evolved into a trend, Gina Whittington Wilson of Clink explained, but now the ideas of less waste, recycled stationery with soy-based ink and eco-friendly venues are becoming standard. Whittington advised brides to kick up the green by choosing a resale dress or at least recycling it, offering a sapling or cactus as a party favor and serving local food.

Silverman said upscale comfort food is finding its way on those local menus.

"(It's) an elegant and creative twist on your childhood favorites," Silverman said. "From a recent wedding I did, mac and cheese becomes five-cheese macaroni with a panko-crusted topping; plain old hamburgers become mini filet mignon burgers with gorgonzola cheese and pomegranate mango chipotle sauce on mini ciabatta rolls; grilled cheese sandwiches become mini-three-cheese grilled cheese sandwiches on artisan bread atop a shot glass of tomato-basil soup."

A couple also might go with food stations featuring, for example, Asian, Italian and Latin cuisine. This offers guests refreshing choices.

For the bar, you can keep it local using the products from area wineries such as Driftwood Vineyards; vodka distilleries such as Tito's; and micro-breweries including Live Oak.

Cake toppers have gone non-traditional, moving away from the typical bride and groom toward cartoon characters and bobbleheads. And some are ditching the cake and treating guests to fun desserts, such as root beer floats, ice cream cones and s'mores.

So keep it festive, go local, stay green — and let it snow, if that's your thing.

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If a traditional cake's not your style, you might find the soda float station from Crave Catering to be a little less stale.