

Questions to Ask When Hiring Your Wedding Cake Designer

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Next to your dress, the cake is probably a wedding's most important icon. And whether you want a traditional multi-tiered confection, a miniature Statue of Liberty (hey, that's where he proposed!) or a cupcake tower, your wedding cake should reflect your personality. Use the following questions as a guide when evaluating a potential cake designer. If you're not familiar with cake terms, please see the cake glossary on page 2.

Business Matters

1. Do you have my wedding date open?
2. How many wedding cakes do you schedule on the same day? *NOTE: You want to feel comfortable that your designer is sufficiently staffed to handle the number of cakes they've scheduled to deliver and set up on your date.*
3. How do you price your cakes? By the slice? Does the cost vary depending on the design and flavors I choose?
4. What is your minimum per-person cake cost?
5. What recommendations can you give me to maximize my budget?
6. Do you have a "menu" of cakes and prices that I can take with me?
7. What are the fees for delivery and setup of the cake? Do you decorate the cake table, too?
8. What do you do if the cake gets damaged in transit to or at my reception site?
9. Do you provide or rent cake toppers, a cake-cutting knife, cake stands, etc.? What are the fees?
10. How far in advance should I order my cake?
11. How much is the deposit and when is it due?
12. When is the final payment due?
13. Are there any additional fees that I should be aware of?
14. What is your refund policy if for some reason I need to cancel my order? What if I'm not happy with the cake?
15. When can I expect to receive my contract from you?

Background Check

16. How long have you been in business?
17. How many weddings have you done?
18. Where did you receive your training?
19. Can you provide me with references from 3-4 recent brides that I can contact?

The Cake

20. If you're not familiar with cake terms, please look at the cake glossary on page 2.
21. Do you have a portfolio of your work I can view, and did you make all the cakes in it?
22. What are your specialties?
23. Can you design a custom cake to match my theme, dress or color scheme, or do I select from set designs?
24. If I provide you with a picture of what I'd like, can you recreate it? Does it cost extra for a custom design?
25. I have an old family cake recipe. Can you adapt it for my wedding cake design?
26. 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?
27. What flavors and fillings do you offer?
28. What are the different ingredients you typically use? Do you offer all organic or vegan options? *TIP: Quality ingredients cost more, but the investment is worth it—the cake will taste better.*
29. Do you have cake tastings? Is there a charge?
30. Do you do both fondant and buttercream icing?

31. Are there any other icing options I should consider? Which do you recommend for my cake design?
32. Can you create sugar paste, gum paste or chocolate flowers? If I decide to have fresh flowers on my cake will you work with my florist or will you obtain and arrange the flowers yourself?
33. Will you preserve the top tier of my cake for my first wedding anniversary or do you provide a special cake for the occasion?
34. Can you make a groom's cake? Is this priced the same as my wedding cake?
35. How much in advance of the wedding is the cake actually made? Do you freeze your cakes? *NOTE: Wedding cakes usually take at least a couple of days to make.*

Useful Tips:

- Arrange a consultation with your potential cake designer in person, and do a tasting before you sign a contract. *NOTE: Not all cake tastings are complimentary.*
- Make sure your cake designer specializes in wedding cakes. A wedding cake is generally much more elaborate than a birthday cake from your local bakery. Your cake professional should have special training in constructing this type of cake.
- In general, you should order your cake 6-8 months prior to your wedding.
- You might be able to save money by choosing one over-all flavor for your cake.

Wedding Cake Glossary

Icings

Buttercream: It's rich and creamy, is easily colored or flavored, and is used for fancy decorations like shells, swags, basketweaves, icing flowers, etc. Since it's made almost entirely of butter (hence the name), buttercream has a tendency to melt in extreme heat, so it's not recommended for outdoor weddings.

Fondant: Martha Stewart's favorite. This icing looks smooth and stiff and is made with gelatin and corn syrup to give it its helmet-like appearance (it's really very cool looking). It looks best when decorated with marzipan fruits, gum paste flowers, or a simple ribbon, like Martha likes to do. Although not as tasty as buttercream or ganache, fondant does not need refrigeration so it's the perfect icing to serve at your beach wedding.

Royal Icing: A mix of confectioner's sugar and milk or egg whites, royal icing is what the faces of gingerbread men are decorated with. It's white, shiny and hard, and does not need to be refrigerated. It's used for decorations like dots and latticework.

Ganache: This chocolate and heavy cream combination is very dark, and has the consistency of store-bought chocolate icing. It can be poured over cakes for a glass-like chocolate finish or used as filling (it stands up wonderfully between cake layers). Due to the ingredients, however, it's unstable—don't use it in hot or humid weather or the icing will slide right off the cake.

Whipped Cream: Delicious, but by far the most volatile, fresh whipped cream is usually not recommended for wedding cakes because they have to be out of the fridge for so long. If you really want to use it (it looks extremely white and fresh, which goes beautifully with real flowers) just keep it in the fridge until the very last second.

Decorations

Marzipan: An Italian paste made of almonds, sugar and egg whites that is molded into flowers and fruits to decorate the cake. They're usually brightly colored and very sugary. Marzipan can also be used as icing.

Gum Paste: This paste, made from gelatin, cornstarch, and sugar, produces the world's most realistic, edible fruit and flower decorations. Famous cake designers like Sylvia Weinstock are huge fans of gum paste. One nice benefit: these decorations last for centuries in storage.

Piping: Piping is ideal for icing decorations like dotted Swiss, basketweave, latticework, and shells. It comes out of a pastry bag fitted with different tips to create these different looks, which can range from simple polka dots to a layered weave that you'd swear is a wicker basket.

Pulled Sugar: If you boil sugar, water, and corn syrup it becomes malleable and the most beautiful designs can be created. Roses and bows that have been made from pulled sugar look like silk or satin—they're so smooth and shiny.

Dragees: These hard little sugar balls are painted with edible gold or silver paint, and they look truly stunning on a big ol' wedding cake.