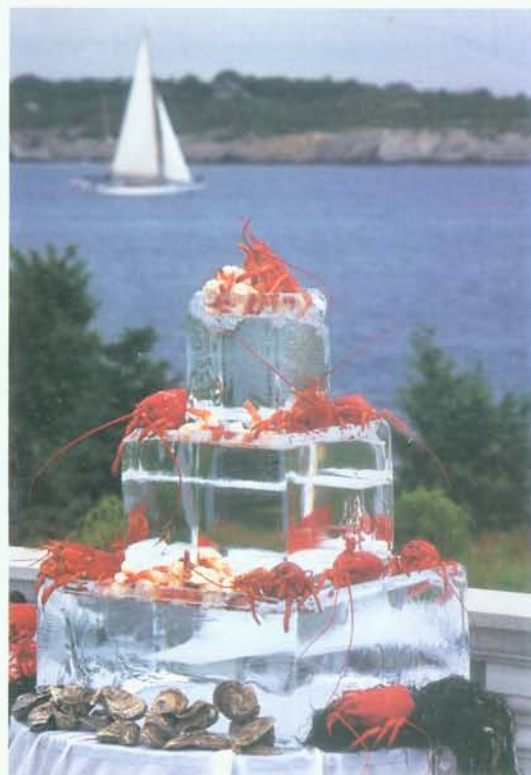




ABOVE: Ginger-crusted Atlantic Salmon with red bliss lyonnaise potatoes, baby carrots and asparagus, keylime beurre blanc and crisp lotus root: **Cafe Nuovo**, Providence, RI

TOP RIGHT: Artisan platter of tender poached Maine lobster with beluga caviar: **Tables of Content**, Boston, MA

BOTTOM RIGHT: Ice sculpture: **Art in Ice**, Warwick, RI



guests have any special dietary requirements, such as vegetarian meals or dishes prepared to meet the needs of diabetics or people with food allergies.

Russell Pryzbek of Russell's Creative Global Cuisine in West Hartford, Conn., says the most important job for a caterer is to listen to what the bride and groom have to say, and get to know them. As a full-service caterer, he breaks down the planning in four stages: choosing a menu, getting a guest count, structuring the timing of the event and making sure the party is backed with the right staff. While new and esoteric foods are hot, Pryzbek likes to transform comfort foods—things people can identify with—into something a little more special. For example, he'll adorn a grilled veal chop with a morel or porcini mushroom sauce, depending on the season.

Holly Safford, owner of Catered Affair in Hingham, Mass., says that soup can replace the ubiquitous salad. "From the standpoint of food cost and ease of preparation, it's wonderful," she says. For fall weddings, she likes a wild mushroom soup "with a whisper of cream;" for spring events, a fresh English

pea or carrot and ginger. Soups also provide a budgetary benefit: If a bride wants to serve a costly rack of lamb, for instance, an elegant soup may help keep other costs in check.

Honoring the cultural background of the couple's families by incorporating ethnic spices, ingredients and dishes also gives the menu a personal touch. "It's what makes the party interesting," says Holland. Head chef Magel feels good food can do more than make the guests happy. "I think, especially at weddings, the best thing the food can do is create conversation," he says. Magel likes to create antipasto centerpieces: "So you have to ask someone, 'can you hand me the olives?' It gives you something to start a conversation," he says.

Ultimately, experts advise couples to be specific in their vision, but open-minded in execution—leave the nuts and bolts planning to the professionals. After all, you have enough on your plate without having to worry about the plate being prepared by your caterer. *Written by Naomi R. Kooker*
Photography: Ron Manville