



NEW AND NOTABLE: EVENT DECOR

Design experts tell us what's in, what's out and what trends are worth exploring.

By Lisa Plummer Savas

Creative, cutting-edge meeting and event decor amounts to a lot more than just pretty window dressings. When executed effectively, stunning design elements and innovative food and drink can take your event to the next level and enhance the attendee experience. But keeping the look and feel of your meetings fresh, appealing and imaginative means staying on top of current trends and being open to new ideas and applications. So to help you create that "wow" factor at your next conference, consider integrating one of these eight current trends or countless ideas offered by expert event designers.

1

Be Bright and Colorful.

As one of the key elements in event decor, color can influence the look, feel and energy of your event's atmosphere, so select the right palette for your audience and message, choose it early in the planning process and use it wisely. If you're apprehensive about going over the top with a color theme, incorporate bright accent colors into table linens, floral arrangements, centerpiece decor and event graphics. For groups with specific logo colors, accents are a great way to enhance a company's color scheme.

TRENDING NOW: Bright, intense colors that combine pastel and jewel tones

"The hottest colors are not true pastels, but they're not crazy jewel tones," says Deborah Elias, owner of Elias Events. "They're a combination of those, and you're seeing them everywhere. For corporate, you're seeing more of the greens, oranges and purples—not necessarily the pinks or yellows—but most of the time it's taking whatever colors are in your logo and going from there."

James Rota, owner of Dazzle Creative Events, says color trends can be a reflection of how people are feeling in a society at large, so in a more optimistic economy, introducing bright and intense colors in meeting environments is more acceptable than it would have been just a few years ago. "I'm using colors and textures such as leathers, pleathers and lame, and I'm mixing and layering colors in, keeping in mind who my audience is," says Rota. "I'm not doing a hot pink party for a bunch of men." One color to consider this year is emerald green, the 2013 Pantone Color of the Year.

2



Foster Networking and Comfort.

Networking is one of the top reasons people attend meetings. Whether outside the meeting space during the conference or inside the ballroom at an evening reception, augment spaces with seating or standing environments that encourage people to gather together and inspire conversation.

TRENDING NOW: Center bars and living-room-style furnishings

"People want to continue to network [at evening events], but if you have your bars in the corners of the rooms, you're splitting your group," says Rota. "You can take 6- or 8-foot bars and combine them with pedestals or stand-to tables in the corners and make a great 12-foot-by-12-foot square or larger, so it looks like one piece. That way, you have all this space for people to belly-up to. I'm also doing a lot of communal tables, which are great for getting a group of six to eight people chatting together."

Attendees also appreciate casual, comfortable spaces outside of the meeting or ballroom where they can catch a quick bite, interact or go off on their own. "We find that there are some people who really don't want to sit at traditional tables for lunch because they're involved or they're working on their iPads or they want to have their own time," says Rota. "So we're creating these living-room niches, keeping the furniture very corporate but giving them other options for seating rather than the traditional semi-rounds, rectangles or squares." These networking niches are less formal and have become very popular, he says. "I'm also augmenting with stand-tos for people who want to eat and run and not get involved in a conversation."



"People want to continue to network at evening events."

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Light the Way.

Lighting is one of the easiest and most effective ways to set the right mood and ambiance in a meeting space. It's also a quick, affordable and dramatic way to transform a typical room into a distinctive and captivating environment. "Put a big portion of your budget aside for lighting," advises Rota. "Good lighting can take a \$1 item and make it look like a \$100 item if it's done the right way."

TRENDING NOW: LED lighting and walls and motion sensor technology

"I always ask for battery-operated, programmable lighting whenever I'm working with a lighting company," says Rota. "Some of them can be programmable to your clients' colors, so you can light anything and you don't have to use cables. It gives you flexibility of where and how you want to light something." Rota also uses motion sensor technology to make projected graphics appear, disappear and transform depending on who's walking by.



Decor Dos and Don'ts

Steve Welsh, creative director at A Legendary Event and The Estate in Atlanta, oversees the design, floral and catering departments at his company. He gave us his top dos and don'ts to help you spot the trends, utilize best practice standards and overcome any decor challenges.

DO:

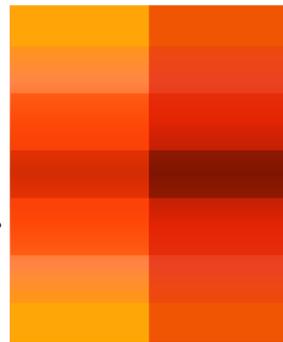
Hire a seasoned professional. A professional with a well-respected reputation and a proven track record will help you save time, money and energy. View the person's work and do your homework. That one decision will dictate the success of your event.



Go on a site visit. Not all venues can appropriately fit installation requirements you may have for an event, so measure once and check it twice. A special events company can secure the details for all load-in docks, determine any noise restrictions or identify foreseeable issues. Make sure all of your decisions with regard to the design of the event work in the venue you have chosen.

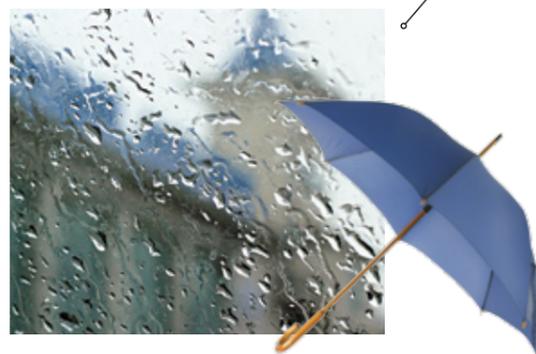


Consider the power of color and what it conveys. Different events bring about various goals and emotions that a given color can either intensify or pacify, so the intention of the event itself is essential when making color selections. For example, green can represent wealth and profit making; orange communicates energy and excitement. Color can make or break an event.



Secure the Pantone colors. The exact shade of a color is critical when doing a corporate event. The company originally selected those colors for a reason, and it is important to use the exact colors to match or accent a company's logo colors. Orange might be coral, burnt, reddish orange or dozens of other shades.

Walk through your event as if you are an attendee. Before your event begins, look at it from the attendee perspective. This can become a way to ensure all of your attendees' needs are met. Consider each person's comfort, safety, ease of finding the location, restrooms and beyond.



DON'T:

Forget first impressions. The first impression of your event will set the mood. Poor first impressions can include an unfriendly staff or no welcome when attendees arrive.

Think small. When it comes to design and leaving impressions, it is much better to have statement decor, floral or catering everyone will remember. Stunning entrance flowers, an appropriately colored carpet with rope and stations, or a dramatic bar make a huge statement and will keep everyone saying, "Wow!"

Cut corners when it comes to safety. You never want to put your guests in harm's way. Small details such as making sure all cords are safely out of the area, candles are used in appropriate areas and all safety requirements in the building are met might be the difference between a fun time and an unwanted accident. Be aware of all precautions a venue requires.

Forget to put Mother Nature on the guest list. Always have a plan B for unexpected rain, wind, heat, cold and humidity. You will never regret being over-prepared. That might include tents, umbrellas, different entrances, increased staff and more. Check weather reports and think ahead.

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F&B: What's In, What's Out



IN

- > Farm-to-table cuisine
- > Vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options
- > Bite-sized foods or desserts
- > Make-your-own snack stations with trail mix or other sweet-and-salty options
- > Healthier, lighter buffets
- > Mid-morning hot breakfast breaks with mini breakfast items
- > Buffets incorporated into the event design theme
- > Organic foods
- > Specialty beverage stations featuring artisanal drinks, wine pairings or local beer tastings
- > Food trucks
- > Smoothie shots
- > Customized menus

OUT

- > Signature cocktails
- > Mashed potatoes in martini glasses
- > Pasta stations
- > Early morning full breakfasts
- > Large portions or quantities
- > Carb-heavy meals
- > Traditional meat-and-potatoes fare
- > Foods with imprinted company logos
- > Cupcakes
- > Chocolate fountains
- > Traditional continental breakfasts
- > One-meal-fits-all menus

Sources: James Rota; Deborah Elias



Follow Patterns and Texturize.

Linens that make a statement on their own are an easy and inventive way to create individuality, because they can carry logo colors and branding throughout the event in a subtle way, says Jessica Moschella, managing director of MTL Communications. "Linens are a pretty easy way to infuse personality into overall decor," says Moschella. "For corporate events, they're a good way to show a little bit of personality and make [the tablescape] more interesting than plain white linens and napkins."

TRENDING NOW: Textured or patterned linens in bold or muted palettes, including stripes and chevron patterns

"If you choose a patterned linen, keep your usage light and only incorporate it into the napkins, seat cushions or as a peekaboo layer of the table cloths," says Moschella. "It adds a little bit of flair and personality to the overall effect. If you're going with a pattern, go pretty muted on the rest of your palette, including dinnerware [and] flowers. If you choose textured linens, which is usually better with a monochromatic color scheme, definitely mix and match. Use one pattern for napkins and another on seat cushions or coverings. Because the color is going to be the same throughout, incorporating multiple textures will catch light differently and give dimension to the decor without being overwhelming."



Harness Flower Power.

Beautiful flowers and flowering plants can spruce up an event space and lift attendee spirits. When overdone they can be obnoxious, distracting and expensive. Get clever with florals by using minimal flowers in fresh, modern ways, aiming for clean, contemporary lines rather than large, romantic arrangements that might send the wrong message, says Rota.

"You have to be very careful when you're adding floral elements to meetings, based on who your audience is," Rota says. "You never want to put something too feminine on a table with a group of men. I find that if you do more linear things, such as branches, sticks, harder goods, woodchips, mushrooms or dried elements plus flowers, you get more of an interesting look that people will study."

TRENDING NOW: Simple, elegant arrangements using flowers such as tulips and arrangements using one type of flower or different types of blooms of the same color

"Tulips are definitely the most popular right now," says Moschella. "They come in a wide range of colors, are easy to arrange, can be used at full height or shortened, and they don't cause a visibility problem. They are also odorless, so they don't affect your taste experience if food is being served, and they're relatively inexpensive. The types of flowers that are used also depends on the season; choosing blooms that are in season is always more cost-effective."

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Q&A: Michael Gonzalez

The creative director and co-owner of New York's Verde Flowers talks centerpieces, eco fads and seasons.

Interview by Mari Shirley

Since arriving on the scene in 2009, Verde Flowers has decorated some of New York's hippest venues. The man behind the designs is Michael Gonzalez, creative director and co-owner of Verde. With more than 20 years of experience in floral design, Gonzalez has worked with a client list that includes HBO, Waldorf Astoria, the New York Yankees and Armani. He treats each floral arrangement as a one-of-a-kind work of art, integrating unexpected objects such as fruits, feathers, candies, branches, lights and textiles to add elements of texture, life and surprise. The visionary artist and industry expert talks color themes, table setups and the importance of seasons.

What is your process when working with an event planner?

Often planners come to us already having a vision and looking for execution. They also can bring us a theme and ask us to elaborate and come up with ideas based on the theme. We often work side by side. There is also a mutual respect we have with event planners because we all know the time, attention, work and detail that goes into an event.

If an event has a color theme, how do you work with it?

If there is a theme, we mix lighter and darker shades to create an arrangement. With one color palette, different flowers will present differently for guests and will create that "Oh my God" feeling throughout the whole event as they enter each room—cocktail hour to dinner.

We can create drama and introduce pops of color. The idea is to layer and create different looks for the whole event—cocktails can be more neutral or softer in color, and dinner is bold and dramatic with darker colors and additional elements (candles, lighting, etc.). You want to create a climax of color and aesthetics in the last stage of the day for the guest.

How does table setup affect what you decide to do for centerpieces?

For a square or round table, minimal arrangements are best. For rectangular tables, we create a design that carries the length of the table. Mixed height offers drama and texture. On high-tops, centerpieces should be low. Avoid tall centerpieces because high-top tables do not have enough surface area to support a tall or wide centerpiece.

Why is it important to incorporate the season into event design?

We incorporate seasonal blooms because they hold the most vivid colors. The head sizes of blooms



"You want to create a climax of color and aesthetics in the last stage of the day for the guest."



Floral Dos and Don'ts: Michael Gonzalez

DO:

- > Develop a mood board that reflects the look and feel you like and are trying to emanate. It will help your florist and designers understand and deliver on your vision.
- > Let your florist know if any of your attendees have major allergies. No one wants excessive sneezing at an event.
- > Make a plan to give your arrangements away or find a charity to pick them up after the event.
- > Allow your designer some creative freedom throughout the process. The client always benefits from being presented with various ideas.

DON'T:

- > Wait until the day of the event to make major changes. It's not easy for anyone involved.
- > Forget to think about what will be seasonably available at the time of your event. Importing can be very expensive, and there may be similar seasonal options available.
- > Ignore the season of your event and the length of time between setup and showtime because some flowers have a tendency to wilt faster or freeze easily.

are largest when the flower is in season because they are peaking. It is also more cost effective to use flowers in season because they don't have to be shipped from out of state or out of country. For example, dahlias are in season in the fall and peonies are in season in spring.

Are people trying to be eco-friendly by using something other than cut flowers?
Eco-friendly arrangements are not exactly trending at the moment. Once something is used so much it goes right out—it's more of a fad. It also really depends on the type of look you are going for at the event. Sometimes you just can't achieve it without additional elements that are not necessarily eco-friendly.



6

Try Unusual Centerpieces.

Besides flowers, unique centerpieces made from alternative or interactive materials are a fun way to create visual appeal and break up the monotony of a typical meeting room environment. "If you are providing any takeaways for your guests, work them into the tablescapes as design elements," says Moschella. "This cuts out visibility issues altogether, creates a unique design and reduces breakdown and cleanup."

TRENDING NOW: Edible centerpieces with candies, fruit, granola and trail mix arranged in fun, eye-catching containers

"At general sessions, consider using snacks to double as room decor, using different containers and different heights," says Rota. He recommends using clear glass containers filled with all different kinds of white candies or for a healthier option, use homemade granola or a make-your-own trail mix. Creatively arranging goodie bags as table decor is a great way to liven up a table and save money.

7

Opt for Unconventional Seating.

For many events, traditional conference and dining seating stifles interaction, creates dead space and hinders visibility. Nobody wants to crane their necks or twist around in their seats to watch a luncheon presentation. That's why less structured seating styles that improve visibility and engagement while maximizing the event space are becoming more common at conferences.



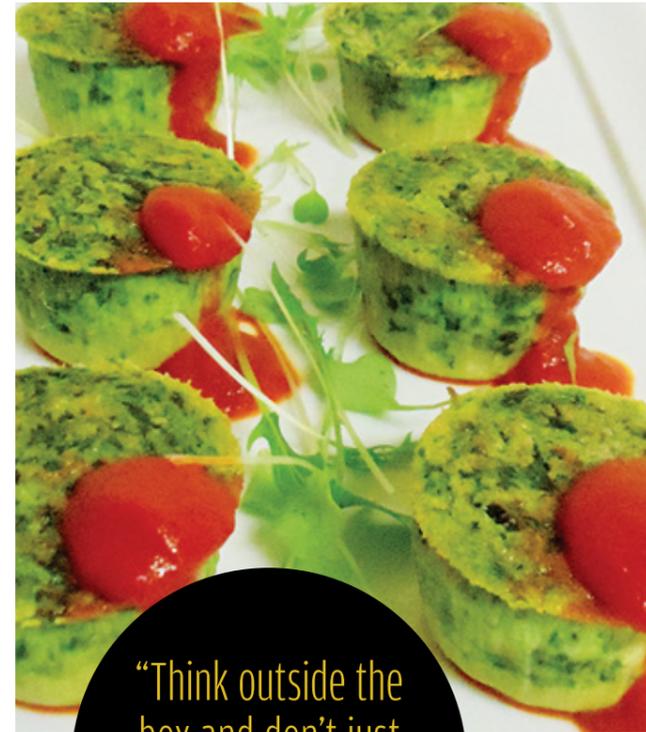
TRENDING NOW: Horseshoe and lounge-style seating for lectures and mixed-level arrangements for seated dining

"Mixing levels with high tops and rounds creates aesthetically unique seating and can help with visibility issues during presentations at meetings," says Moschella. "The mix of rounds and rectangular tables allows for larger group seating without having to break up teams or co-workers who are attending as a group." Another great option for lectures: Instead of run-of-the-mill bleacher seats or rows of chairs, create original groupings of chairs, couches and ottomans that can promote more conversational settings. "[They] are much more comfortable if people are going to be sitting for hours at a time," Moschella adds.

8

Step Up Your F&B.

As attendee palates become more sophisticated and discerning, taking the one-meal-fits-all approach to event menus isn't going to cut it anymore. In fact, as more people adopt healthier eating habits, customized menus that support healthy eating and accommodate special dietary needs have gone from a trend to the new normal in meeting and event cuisine.



TRENDING NOW: Farm-to-table cuisine, as well as vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free menu options

"It's not just having a vegetarian option anymore," says Elias. Dietary concerns range from allergies to gluten-free to vegan. "Think outside the box and don't just accept the menu [the venue offers]. I don't ever work straight off of that. I request a meeting with the chef so that he understands what my vision is for the event, and I always challenge him to come up with something that's not on their standard menu. You'd be surprised how excited they get," adds Elias. "They're always up for that." Consider incorporating interesting buffets featuring super foods or more adventurous offerings such as kale and micro-greens or quinoa instead of pasta.

"Think outside the box and don't just accept the menu the venue offers."

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