

Your Drink of Choice

Put your personal stamp on the reception with signature—and even local—beverage choices.

AMID THE FLURRY OF WEDDING details, deciding what drinks to serve—a detail many of your guests will truly appreciate—can be overlooked. And it's worth noting that, left unchecked, the tab for a full, open bar can quickly eat up the wedding budget. Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to add unique touches to your beverage menu, from signature cocktails to perfect Washington wine pairings to serving local libations, without breaking the bank.

If a full, open bar isn't an affordable option for your budget, consider offering one to three signature cocktails alongside beer, wine and soda. This is not only a money saver—a couple can

halve liquor costs by using this method in lieu of a full bar, according to Rebecca Pigeon, the wedding specialist at Capitol Hill's City Catering—it's also a memorable way to add a personalized touch to the reception.

"A signature cocktail can highlight something special about a couple or the wedding," says Lendy Hensley, owner of City Catering. "Serve a drink you both love or the drinks you each ordered on your first date." Pigeon adds that City Catering has worked with couples to create personalized drinks inspired by their favorite flavors, such as Bacon-Infused-Vodka Bloody Marys and Italian parsley-muddled gin martinis, and they have infused simple syrups with flavors such as jalapeño at the ready to make specialty cocktails.

Another way to inject personality into your signature drink menu—while also offering a respectful nod to your families—is to consider your cultural heritage. Mint juleps served in classic silver cups celebrate Southern roots; a limoncello-based cocktail offers a taste of the Mediterranean (and serving limoncello from Seattle-based Italian spirits importer Finamoré adds an extra local touch); a bit of lemongrass in a vodka spritzer evokes Southeast Asia.

Once you get started, though, it's easy to get carried away. "Choose drinks that can be made properly by the number of staff you can afford," Hensley warns. "Avoid drinks that have a complicated series of ingredients."

But what if Grandpa is simply not happy without his favorite whiskey? "Keep a special bottle at the bar for one or two important people," advises Lisa

Dupar of Redmond-based Lisa Dupar Catering. "Let your server know who the bottle is for and everyone is happy."

Another way to keep your bar budget in check is to serve cocktails only during the cocktail hour and serve wine and beer only during dinner, suggests Dupar. "Once you move to the dinner hour, people are usually looking for wine pairings anyway."

Focusing on your favorite flavors isn't the only way to share your tastes with your guests. When choosing beverages, don't overlook our region's bounty of locally produced wine, beer, spirits and soda. Washington has more than 600 wineries; consider creating a Washington wine or beer flight—a sampling of several regional wines or beers—or working with your caterer to pair different local wines with each dish. "I always ask for the menu to make sure I can offer a perfect pairing," says Ria Jenkins of Tacoma's Stir'n It Up Liquid Catering. The Wine Outlet, a discount wine store in SoDo and Interbay, is another good source. "We always have a few bottles open for people to try," says staff member Andrea Mirante, "to help us lead them in the right direction."

True wine lovers can head right to the source and wed at a winery, for both picturesque grounds and tasty libations. Wineries usually forbid bringing in outside wines, but most wineries, such as Lake Chelan's Tsillan Cellars, allow many nonalcoholic beverages in addition to their wines, while Woodinville's Novelty Hill/Januik Winery allows champagne and beer. Stacy Lill, co-owner of DeLille Cellars, also in Woodinville, takes a more relaxed approach: "We don't mind if



The Nelson B&B, a blood orange-infused vodka martini with Campari, from City Catering Co.

other wines, champagne or anything else is served!" she laughs.

In addition to wine, some of the world's best microbrews are made in Washington, and recently Dry Fly Distilling became the state's first distillery since Prohibition. (Guests would surely get a kick out of cocktails made with locally crafted vodka, gin and whiskey.) Even teetotalers can enjoy local beverages, with mocktails or single bottles from Pioneer Square-based Dry Soda Company or South Lake Union-based Jones Soda.

After deciding what drinks you'd like to serve, consider logistics. Justin Heacock of Seattle's Cocktail Bartenders for Hire says the first thing couples must do is check about staffing: "Find out if the venue or caterer employs a bar staff and what kind of bar setup they have." If you need to hire a private bartender, the extra cost—usually \$35 an hour plus additional fees—can often outweigh any concerns and give you peace of mind the day of. "We set everything up and break everything down and make sure your guests are safe by not overpouring or overserving," says Jenkins of Stir'n It Up Liquid Catering. She adds that most venues require a banquet permit; couples opting to bring their own booze can pick one up for \$10 at any local liquor store. Be sure to work out tipping—avoid having a tip jar placed on the bar—and ask about other, possibly unexpected, expenses.

And when it's time to toast the bride and groom with a glass of bubbly, Jenkins says a new twist on this tradition can come with adding flavored liqueurs, such as the fruit-flavored liqueurs made by Portland's Clear Creek Distillery, to local sparkling wines. "We often match the drinks to their wedding colors," she says.

By evening's end, your guests will not only be wowed by the delicious and unique drinks you served, but will appreciate an introduction to the Northwest's innovative and delicious natural resources. *



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