





CHAPTER ONE

# designing the cake

*Designing and creating a wedding cake is an exciting opportunity. It is challenging, intimidating, a little scary, and, in most cases, an expensive undertaking. It is also a task that requires a great deal of skill, a lot of planning, and much patience. A wedding cake is uniquely personal because it is based on a couple's specific ideas. The design can be simple yet elegant and not require a lot of work; or it can involve many hours of labor, including intensive piping, sculpting, shaping, coloring, and structuring.*

## DESIGNING THE CAKE WITH THE COUPLE

*The elements to consider when designing a cake in consultation with a bridal couple include color, texture, theme, shape, and décor.*

The color scheme of the cake can be anything from a simple palette of pastel tones to something bold or complex, like reds, blacks, violets, and dark greens. The texture of the cake can be smooth (rolled fondant) or textural (such as “embossed rolled icing” inlay or appliqué or piping on a cake). The theme can be dramatic, whimsical, traditional, seasonal, or elegant. The shape can be traditional round or square, oval, horse-shoe, or teardrop. The final design can incorporate a wide range of techniques, including simple to advanced piping, sugar flowers, marzipan sculpture, latticework, painting, advanced embroidery, and airbrushing. All of this will be based on the couple’s budget,

tastes, and expectations and the talent of the cake artist.

Let’s look more closely at each of these tools used in the successful designing of a cake.

### color

The color of the cake is perhaps its most important feature. Getting the color wrong when the bride has her heart set on something very specific can ruin the wedding celebration for the couple. The bride and groom often come to their appointment with a cake artist with a general idea of what they want the cake to look like and, most specifically, the color of the cake. Some couples may even bring in color swatches, a color wheel, or paint chips to make sure

the cake artist knows what they want.

Color is used to set a mood. It expresses emotion, and it is essential to the overall ambience of the event. No longer are all wedding cakes white. Some couples may opt for subtle shades of white, such as off-white, ivory, cream, tan, or beige. Some couples may select pastel shades, such as peach, lemon yellow, soft pink, lavender, or sky blue, that will complement the wedding. And then there are couples who want bold colors, such as red, black, deep violet, dark blue, and burgundy. All of these colors are achievable, either by purchasing already-colored rolled icing fondants or by coloring your own white rolled fondant. Colored rolled fondant is more expensive



than white rolled fondant that you then color yourself. Also, coloring fondant yourself gives you flexibility in choosing and matching just the right color and tone. Practicing mixing colors with small amounts of white fondant can prevent the more costly mistake of ending up with the wrong color mixed into a large amount of white fondant.

You can use a color wheel or an online color schemer to review complementary color tones. An online color schemer is a color studio that provides you with hundreds of color tones and palettes. You select a color, and it provides you with complementary or harmony color tones. It's a super visual color wheel. Several good online color schemers to try are [www.colorschemer.com](http://www.colorschemer.com) and [www.colorsfire.com](http://www.colorsfire.com). This kind

of wheel can be especially useful when the couple is seeking colors that complement the base color of the cake.

## MIXING COLORS

Mixing colors is an art all to itself. Looking at a color swatch or wheel is one thing; creating that color in icing is another. Food colors come in liquid, paste, gel, and powdered forms. Gel colors are the most economical, being less expensive and easier to blend into icing. To create and test colors, use a small amount of icing and carefully color the icing using a toothpick. Note approximately how much color is needed to color a small amount of icing and then use that proportion

to calculate what you need to color a much larger portion.

Another technique is to squeeze a tiny portion of food color into an artist tray and then add a tiny amount of gel or paste labeled "bright white" or "liquid whitener" to bring out the pastel tone of the color. Bright white and liquid whitener are titanium dioxide and are more liquid than regular gel colors. Care should be taken not to use too much of this, as food colors (especially these whiteners) contain glycerin. This ingredient is used to keep colors soft, and too much of it will change the consistency of the icing and the drying time. Once you mix your colors using these whiteners you can get an immediate color tone, which spares you a lot of guesswork.

## USING LIQUID WHITENER

You can add powdered food color to a gel color to get more intensity, but only after the liquid whitener has been added to the gel color. Adding powdered food color to gel or paste colors without the liquid whitener will have no effect.



## texture

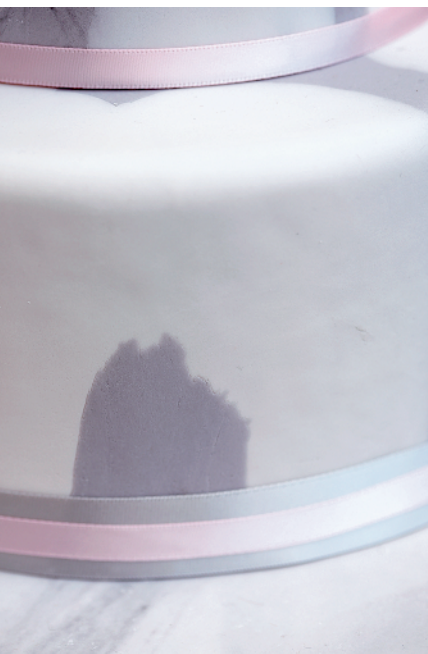
A huge variety of textures can be used on wedding cakes. A textured wedding cake is not traditional, but it can offer the bridal couple a fun, exciting, and different perspective. A smooth cake can be painted to look textural, or a textured rolling pin can be rolled over icing to give a fabriclike look to a cake. This is especially useful when a bride-to-be wants the texture of her wedding gown matched in icing. A textured rolling pin that matches or comes close to the designs on a bridal gown can

probably be found. For those designs where there are no special rolling pins, you will have to use ingenuity, such as piping the textured design directly on the cake or creating a silicone mold using a piece of the lace from the bridal dress. With a mold, all you need to do is press icing into the mold; when the icing is released, it will have the exact same lace impression as the bride's dress.

Fabric ribbon or icing ribbons can also be used to give texture to a cake. Or the cake can be draped in rolled icing, which imparts a

spectacular texture. Piping Swiss dots all over a cake also adds a beautiful texture, and overpiping gives it a dramatic three-dimensional look.

All of these ideas and many others must be at your fingertips when you interview a couple to design their special cake. But always keep the budget in mind—the more intricate the cake, the more expensive it will be!



## theme

Theme wedding cakes are all the rage. Couples are very imaginative when it comes to creating cake concepts that represent their lives. Sometimes the most outrageous concepts for a cake can bring a smile even to the most creative cake artists.

A theme can be anything. A couple may want blown-up balloons on the wedding cake or the cake itself shaped into a hot-air balloon; a cake decorated with marzipan farm animals; a wedding cake made of cupcakes or decorated with cookies; a cake that looks like the sea or a beach scene with pebbles and seashells and sand, all made out of sugar; a cake decorated with snack foods; a cake shaped like the pyramids; or a patriotic-themed cake with flags. The possibilities are endless. A theme cake does not have to be gimmicky; it also can be

breathhtakingly beautiful using classical or creative design work. It can be artistic, rustic, modern, or traditional. Almost anything can be designed and turned into a wedding cake.

These types of cakes can require a lot of planning, sculpting, food painting, and hand-shaped ornaments made out of a sugar material. Theme cakes can also be more expensive than traditional cakes, as many techniques are needed to create a couple's dream. As the cake artist, you would be

wise to limit the scope of the design based on the couple's budget. Ultimately, you want a good working relationship with the couple, and the couple has the final say as to what the cake should look like. But it's important to inform the couple that the cake will be created in the spirit of the design chosen. Except for anything major, you should have artistic license to make small changes without notifying the couple, as long as those changes are done in the spirit of the agreed-on design.



## shape

Cakes in general can come in any conceivable shape. Wedding cakes for the most part are still predominantly round, square, oval, heart-shaped, and scalloped around the edges, but that doesn't mean that a couple will actually choose one of these shapes. A couple may wish for a wedding cake shaped like a horseshoe or a pyramid, a ball shape or a kidney shape, or even a cake shaped like a mountain. There is no end to the possibilities

the couple may come up with, and a skilled cake artist can create a wide range of different-shaped cakes.

There are many things to consider when choosing a nontraditional shape: choosing a sturdy cake, using preserves instead of a mousse or curd filling, and creating strong structural support. Also, when icing an unusual shape, you should have extra icing to allow for a much larger circumference, especially when icing a cake in rolled icing.

You also need to consider how the cake will be cut and served when the shape is unusual. You might need to make the unusual shapes larger to accommodate the bride and groom's reception, or you can have an iced sheet cake in the kitchen of the reception hall to help accommodate the guests.



## décor

The design of the cake is the most important reason a prospective bride and groom come to a cake artist. Each cake artist has a body of work in a specific style. That style is the artist's trademark. A prudent cake artist can move easily into any style and thus give the bride and groom a wide range of design options. At the cake artist's fingertips are a wide range of techniques, including textured rolling pins, premade sugar flowers, simple to advanced piping, inlay work, appliqué, airbrushing, marzipan sculpting, chocolate modeling, gumpaste designs, pastillage, painting, and perhaps pulled or

blown sugarwork. The techniques for these and other decorative elements are covered in detail in subsequent chapters.

The design of the cake determines how expensive the cake will be, so the couple's budget will determine how elaborate the cake design can be. The more techniques used to design the cake, the more the cake will cost. A wise cake artist will produce several drawings based on the couple's price range, thus giving the clients the best possible options for their special day.

For example, the cake artist draws three drawings: a high-end drawing, a moderately priced

drawing, and a low-end drawing. The high-end drawing might contain several sprays of hand-shaped flowers and fine pipework, like brush embroidery or fine freehand embroidery piping. A moderately priced drawing might have one large spray of sugar flowers on the top tier and a gilded monogram of the couple on the middle tier. A low-end drawing might have purchased premade gumpaste flowers, a simple bead border on all the tiers, and perhaps some Swiss dots.





## THE CONSUMER BRIDE

**B**ridal couples invest a wealth of planning in their wedding, from selecting a wedding gown, finding a floral designer, and selecting a reception hall to finding the perfect cake artist. Before choosing the cake artist who will produce their dream wedding cake, the bride and groom have some homework to do.

First, they should set a price range for what they are willing to pay for their wedding cake, noting that very popular or celebrated cake artists will cost considerably more than someone perhaps not as well known or well publicized. This doesn't mean that a couple can't get the cake of their dreams—there are talented cake designers all over, charging a wide range of prices. The cost of the cake can vary from area to area and from state to state. There are no general or specific prices for wedding cakes from a cake artist. Cost is determined by how large the cake will be (how many guests it is to serve) and the intricacy of

the design. Prices can range from \$5.00 to \$15.00 per serving, and the cost can go much higher, depending on the intricacy of the design and the popularity of the cake artist. If a couple is not prepared to pay these kinds of prices, another option is getting a wedding cake as a package deal through the couple's caterer, which can cost from \$2.50 to \$8.00 per serving. The last option would be to purchase a wedding cake from their local bakery. The price may be lower, but the couple will be limited with regard to designs, icings, and fillings. The small details that a cake artist can add to a cake may not be possible at a local bakery.

When first contacted by the couple, you can help them come prepared for your first meeting by telling them what you will need to know. Being prepared means knowing the guest count for the reception, the colors they want incorporated into the design—including swatches or other types of color samples—the overall theme they want represented, and their

budget. They should know the number of tiers they want, should have an idea of what type of cake they desire, including fillings, and, if they want the cake artist to match a design from the bride's dress to the cake, they should bring a picture of the dress to their consultation. They should also be aware of any site considerations, such as stairs and the size of the reception room. Last, they should bring a checkbook.

Almost every cake artist now has a website, which gives the prospective bride and groom an opportunity to see the designer's portfolio. If you do not have a website, you will most certainly have a photo portfolio to share with a couple during their appointment.

The couple will generally meet with you at least once, and often several times, before signing a contract. The following is the typical sequence of steps involved in choosing a wedding cake, describing both your role and that of the consumer.

## step one

*First contact.* The bridal couple calls the cake artist and asks for an appointment. When the clients call, they likely already have a gut feeling about the cake artist. Often the purpose of this appointment is for the clients to talk to the cake artist and perhaps see some of his or her work more closely and to inquire about prices. This also gives the cake artist an opportunity to observe the client and determine whether this opportunity will likely lead to a congenial transaction or one that will be exceptionally stressful. At the conclusion of this appointment, the clients indicate that they will get back to the cake artist after reviewing all of their options. This gives the clients the opportunity to visit with other cake artists and compare designs and prices. The cake artist then makes notes about the clients, their demeanor or enthusiasm, and their ability to pay.

## step two

*Sampling flavors.* The clients call back and indicate they are strongly leaning in the cake artist's direction. The cake artist can set up another appointment with the clients—perhaps this time with a few samples of cakes, icings, and fillings. This step can be done at the very first meeting as well if the cake artist feels strongly that the clients are leaning his or her way.

Having samples ready when the clients come in is a way of extending a good first impression and goes a long way toward helping the artist secure the job. The cake artist might wish to limit the types and flavors of cakes and icings at this stage unless the artist is part of a large establishment that produces a wide variety of cakes on a daily basis.

## CLIENT CONSULTATIONS

Clients can meet with a cake artist several times before a decision is made. The first step is the introduction, with the client seeing some cakes and perhaps a portfolio. The second step is a paid consultation, which can include sampling cakes and icings and a quick sketch of the cake to be considered. The next step would be for the clients to secure the artist's services for the established wedding date. At this stage, the cake artist may ask for a one-third deposit on the total cost of the cake. Normally the contract would be signed at the same time as a deposit is made. The last step would be to get the balance of the payment two weeks before the cake is due. All of this can change depending on the cake artist and the clients. All of these steps can be reduced to just two steps or, in a rare case, just one! The cake is then produced three to five days before it is delivered.

## step three

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*First sketches.* This second (or third) meeting with the clients generally becomes a paid consultation. This means the clients pay a fee for the cake artist's time. As a means of securing the contract from the client, the cake artist would be wise to tell the clients that this fee is deducted from the total cost of the cake should they wish to sign a contract. Generally, a consultation fee can be from \$50 to \$150. At this meeting the clients continue to look through books or pictures of cakes designed by the cake artist. They also bring in pictures and ideas of their own. During this meeting the cake artist begins sketching an idea

of what the client is looking for. This does not have to be a perfect drawing but should give the clients an idea of what the cake would look like. If the cake artist does not draw, software is available to help design a cake. Once the cake is designed and the couple has decided on the type of cake flavor, icing, and filling, the process is almost finished.

It is possible that the clients still won't commit to the cake designer, even after they have paid a consultation fee. The fee should still be applied, even if the client decides months later to order from the cake artist.

## step four

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*Deposit and contract.* The final step, once the clients have chosen the cake artist as their designer, is for the cake artist to request a deposit from the clients and for both to sign a contract. The deposit is typically one-third of the total cost of the cake. This deposit should be received within two weeks of the consultation date (Step 3) to secure a date for the wedding cake. This is another tactical move to secure the contract, but the cake artist should take care not to overwhelm the client. Once the contract is signed, the cake artist should request full payment two weeks prior to the wedding day.

### DESIGN TECHNOLOGY

Cake artists and bridal couples alike can use a software program called Wedding Cake Design Pro to help them design the couple's dream cake. This 3-D tool helps everyone visualize the perfect cake by programming the software for specifics such as cake shape, the number of tiers, the type of cake designs that can be used on the side or top of the cake, what type of border piping to use at the bottom of each tier, and what types of elements the bride and groom wish to have on the top of the cake. The site is [weddingcakedesignpro.com](http://weddingcakedesignpro.com). The software can be ordered and downloaded immediately.

## CAKE SIZE AND COST

The size of the cake is determined by the number of reception guests. For instance, a cake that feeds 150 people, with each person getting a standard 1 × 2-in. (2.5 × 5.1 cm) serving, can be composed of 6 × 4-in. (15.2 × 10.2 cm), 10 × 4-in. (25.4 × 10.2 cm), and 14 × 4-in. (35.6 × 10.2 cm) layers. At \$10 per serving, this cake will cost \$1,500. This price would be considered average for a cake prepared by a noted cake artist. (For more information on serving cakes of all shapes and sizes, see pages 257–266.)

The techniques required to decorate a cake will also affect the cost. For example, to reduce the cost of a cake, a couple may choose a fresh floral arrangement on the top tier instead of handmade sugar flowers. In this case, the cake artist would need access to a floral artist that produces organically grown flowers and, of course, flowers that are nonpoisonous. When fresh flowers are used, the cake artist and floral artist should determine far in advance of the wedding date who will place the flowers on top of the wedding cake.

Another option that can reduce the cost of a cake is to prepare the cake layers in Styrofoam. Styrofoam is often used as a cake dummy in photography. When used in place of an actual wedding cake, a small section of the Styrofoam is cut away and a section of actual cake is put in its place. Or the top tier of the cake is real and the bottom two tiers are Styrofoam. To feed the guests at the reception hall, sheet cakes are cut and served to the guests.

## FLAVOR COMBINATIONS

The flavor of the cake is of utmost importance. Wedding cake flavors can range from a simple butter cake to lemon, almond, walnut, genoise, red velvet, chocolate, pound, fruit, or even a decorated cheesecake. Flavor combinations are important to the palate, and

the wedding cake should complement any other desserts served at the reception. For example, vanilla and almond are a wonderful flavor blend, as are lemon and raspberry, chocolate and raspberry, lemon and coconut, peach and vanilla, lemon and almond, and many more. The cake artist should

experiment with flavor combinations and test-market them to get good feedback. Ultimately, the clients will determine what they want, but it's up to the cake artist to steer the clients in the right direction. (See the Flavor Combinations chart, page 236.)

## ESTIMATING TIME

The time it takes to prepare the cake varies depending on the intricacy of the cake and the human resources available. A cake designer with no staff might limit the number of cakes produced per year, versus a larger establishment with several employees that can produce several cakes a month or even a weekend. For the individual cake artist, estimating the time it will take to produce the cake will vary depending on the techniques used to decorate the cake. For example, a three-tier cake to serve 150 people can be done within a few days and even less if several people work on it. If the cake design is relatively simple—the cake enrobed

in rolled fondant, Swiss dots on all three tiers, a bead border around the bottom of each tier, and perhaps a large spray of sugar flowers (made in advance or purchased ready-made) on the top tier—the cake can be done easily within one or two days. A more intricate design with five tiers, brush embroidery or freehand embroidery on all five tiers, bead piping around the bottom of each tier, classical drapery work, and several sprays of gumpaste flowers can take upward of three to five days to complete, provided the flowers were done in advance.

For a typical cake, the layers can be baked two to three days in advance, cooled, wrapped well in

plastic wrap, and then refrigerated. The filling can be made the same day as the cake or on another day. Most cake artists use a commercial filling to save time and cost.

The icing is generally made a day or two in advance. Generally, if a cake is enrobed in rolled fondant, there is a layer of buttercream icing under the rolled fondant. This helps adhere the fondant to the cake and it gives the cake a richer, more delicious taste. The rolled fondant is generally purchased rather than made from scratch in order to save valuable time.

Any sugar floral work can be done way in advance as it does not spoil or require refrigeration.

## TRANSPORTATION AND ASSEMBLY

Transporting and assembling a cake is not as difficult as it might seem. The design of the cake determines this issue. The majority of cakes seen in bridal magazines are stack tiered, which means that one tier sits on top of another, with dowel rods inserted into each tier for support. Stacked three-tier cakes travel quite easily. However, the more tiers there are, the greater the risk. If the tiers are elevated with pillars, then the assembly would need to be completed at the wedding reception site.

Most cakes can be transported quite easily in an SUV, van, or station wagon with a flat surface. Rubber foam can be placed on the flat surface to minimize shock during travel. The cake should be

in a box with the bottom lined with nonskid material. This will ensure that the cake, which is attached to a cake board, will not move.

In the case of a stacked six- to eight-tier cake, the cake artist can stack the bottom three tiers and place them in a box. Then the next three tiers can be stacked and placed in a separate box, and the last two tiers can be stacked and placed in a separate box. All three boxes of stacked cakes can be assembled at the reception hall.

Depending where you live, delivery services are available specifically for cakes. In the New York area, there is a service called Signature Delivery. You contact the service and explain what is to be delivered. The service provides large vehicles and caring individuals who will pick up your cake and carefully deliver it to the reception hall. You can ask to go with the deliverer to ensure that the cake arrives safely. This service will pick up and deliver almost anywhere.

### TRANSPORTING CAKES BY PLANE

If traveling by plane, the cake artist should contact his or her local carrier and inquire about regulations for shipping a cake by plane. If this is a small two-tier cake, it might just fit under the seat in front of you if someone is traveling with the cake. If it's three tiers or higher, ask if the flight attendant can place the cake in the front of the plane. This should be requested in advance of the flight. If the cake artist can build a platform on which to place the tier cakes and wrap the cake and the platform in heavy plastic wrap, the cake can travel in the belly of the plane. Again, the cake artist would need to make these arrangements with the carrier in advance, and someone on the other end of the flight would need to retrieve the cake when it arrives.