

# Food & drink



[Left] A pretty-as-a-picture pimp your prosecco trolley by **The Little Bar Group** ([thelittlebargroup.com](http://thelittlebargroup.com))

## Happy HOUR

**I** love canapés. Honestly, I think every meal should be made up of half a dozen delicious little nibbles, all beautifully laid out for me to graze on and enjoy at my leisure. Loads of people hate the restaurant world's current mania for small plates (if you haven't heard a waiter say "I'd suggest ordering two to three dishes per person," you have clearly not been dining out lately), but I personally can't get enough of it. It's basically a glorified canapé experience, allowing you to gorge on a variety of tasty morsels without limiting yourself on flavour or overstressing your stomach's capacity. (My bank balance was unavailable for comment at this time.)

You won't be surprised to learn, then, that I think the cocktail hour is far more important than the wedding breakfast itself – the food's tastier, and your guests won't be too drunk to appreciate it. I'm not the only person who thinks this part of the day is generally underrated. "Drinks receptions are really the first opportunity you get to mingle with loved ones, and the first chance they have to congratulate you," reasons Kelly Naylor, managing director at Bespoke Catering & Events. "The ceremony is often held at an awkward time of the day, when guests won't have had lunch, so this is a key moment to satisfy rumbling tummies."

### CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES

If, like I would be, you're raring to get stuck into miniature versions of all your favourite dishes, hold your horses: it's easy to get ahead of yourself, so caterers have a tried-and-

tested method for putting together your all-day menu. "We tend to work backwards," explains Kelly. "Working out your wedding breakfast first helps to ensure you won't be repeating anything. For example, if you're having a smoked-salmon starter, we wouldn't recommend a smoked-salmon blini as one of your nibbles. Getting the balance right across the whole event is really important."

When you've got your main meal sorted, it's time to get creative. "We have a set canapé menu which helps couples get a first look at what we can offer; these options can then be altered or we can add in things to suit any requirements," comments Elli Preece at Simon Preece Food Creations. "Some popular choices include mini Yorkshire puds with horseradish mash topped with braised beef, and bruschetta and deep-fried rocket. If you've got a theme for the day, we'd love to come up with exciting new canapés for it."

Looking to blow the budget on bites? Kelly can make it happen: "You could pair your canapés with miniature drinks – we've often served up mini tacos presented with a little Patron bottle filled with a margarita."

On that note, it's not just grub you need to consider: this is booze's moment in the spotlight, so give your selection of libations the attention it deserves. "The drinks reception can help set the tone for the rest of the evening," says Michael Mackenzie of Glasgow's Pure Bartending, which provides mobile bar hire, as well as trained staff. "We can tailor the cocktail menu entirely to the client's preferences, and can even create a signature tippie in honour of the happy

It's a tough job, but someone's got to do it: Zoë Boothby feasts on cocktails and canapés as she discovers the secrets to getting your drinks reception off to a flying start



[Above] Take bespoke to a whole new level with an edible cocktail topper emblazoned with your names. Nice touch, **The Little Bar Group** ([thelittlebargroup.com](http://thelittlebargroup.com))

[Below] Pure Bartending's talented mixologists will keep your guests hydrated ([purebartending.co.uk](http://purebartending.co.uk))



## PLANNING *food & drink*

[Below] It's not just about the actual drink – Pure Bartending can ensure that your bevvie is garnished to perfection ([purebartending.co.uk](http://purebartending.co.uk))



“THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO LET US KNOW YOUR BUDGET. WE’LL WORK WITH YOU TO DESIGN A PACKAGE TO MEET YOUR NEEDS”

couple. Remember, guests have come to expect a high standard of cocktail, which our talented mixologists can guarantee with appropriate garnishes and glassware – no one wants a plastic cup anymore!”

What about teetotal or underage guests? Pure Bartending has plenty of mocktails (“They look and taste as good as the real thing, just minus the hangover!”), while Maxine McCourt from The Little Bar Group, which rents out novelty bars, has a number of thirst-quenching recommendations, such as fresh juices with fabulous garnishes and non-alcoholic beer and fizz.

In the way of inspiring entertainment ideas, the experts have seen it all: Kelly tells me about an ice sculpture that Bespoke recently arranged to take centre stage in a sushi station, while Maxine recounts a hilarious event where the couple had arranged archery for their guests. Michael also points out that the flair bartenders he can provide are, quite rightly, a form of entertainment in themselves. We’ll take ours shaken, served up with a Harlem Shake, thanks very much.

### RAISE A GLASS

Now, it’s time to talk dosh: how much moolah should you be putting aside for cocktail hour? Well, Elli reckons that the drinks reception should account for around an eighth of your overall catering costs. Dividing it another way, Maxine estimates that a third of your drinks budget should go towards this portion of the day. And, as

Michael points out, this is the stage of the day where a lot of couples opt to provide their guests with a couple of complimentary drinks before switching to a cash bar later in the evening, so it’s imperative you really think about what you’re offering. If you have concerns, he stresses, don’t be scared to speak to your suppliers: “The most important thing is to let us know your budget and your desired outcome. We will work with you to design a package that meets your requirements.”

If you do need to save some cash, Elli suggests limiting your spread: “We would advise serving only four different canapés if money is an issue – it costs less but still gives guests plenty of options. Tartlets and pastry cups are slightly cheaper to make but still appeal to the eyes and tastebuds. Why not have a goat’s cheese mousse pastry cup topped with beetroot purée, or a ham hock version with minted peas?”

On the liquid side of things, experienced suppliers have all sorts of hacks to trim costs. “Our ‘Personalise Your Drink’ stations are a great space for your guests to mingle and create impressive tipples together and can be a really effective addition to the venue’s drinks reception package,” Maxine considers.

And there you have it – the recipe for a delightful drinks reception. The only problem is that, should you disappear off for photos, you won’t be able to enjoy all your hard work for yourself. It’s tempting to do a post-wedding shoot instead... ♥

## PARTY TRICKS

KEEN TO JAZZ UP YOUR DRINKS RECEPTION? HERE ARE SOME LEFT-FIELD IDEAS THAT ARE BOTH FUN AND A TASTE SENSATION



### THE OYSTERMAN EVENTS

Love seafood? Book The Oysterman Events to serve up fresh Scottish oysters, shucked and seasoned by a pro. Oysters are, of course, a famous aphrodisiac: sample a couple yourself to get in the mood for the wedding night – oi oi. [www.theoystermanevents.co.uk](http://www.theoystermanevents.co.uk)

### SOMETHING BREWED

Weddings are tiring affairs, so give your guests a little pick-me-up with Something Brewed. The mobile coffee and tea bar uses only the highest-quality products to pep up (and warm up) your gang so they’re ready for the next leg of the party. [www.somethingbrewed.co.uk](http://www.somethingbrewed.co.uk)



### THE DISPENSARY BAR

This unique bar in a hot-air balloon serves up craft cocktails made from a blend of premium spirits and natural, artisanal liqueurs, bitters and syrups. It goes without saying that it’s also a prime photo op for guests – take it to the skies! [www.thedispensarybar.co.uk](http://www.thedispensarybar.co.uk)



Photos: chiphphoto.co.uk