

The Moment

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CELEBRATIONS

Forget traditional weddings. As Hongkongers' tastes evolve, so do their wedding celebrations, with couples splashing out on everything from eclectically-themed décor to hi-tech wedding favours for one-of-a-kind events.

"People always want their weddings to be a bit different and they don't mind spending more to make that happen," says Evelyn Mills, founder and group creative director of luxury wedding planner Marriage Maestros.

One of the wedding banquets Mills planned, for example, had a *Midsummer Night's Dream* theme. The hotel ballroom was decorated with hanging gardens and a forest backdrop, behind which was a "secret garden" of dessert treats.

"Themed weddings are very popular and the most memorable are the ones in which the couple choose a theme that represents who they are," says Conway Lau, planning and business development director at Central-based wedding planner Pink Wedding.

He says couples are also doing away with conventional practices for a more modern feel.

Ice-breaker games and magic shows have decreased in popularity, while Lau says the iconic "Pig Parade" – in which waiters carrying platters of suckling pig march into the dining room amid dimmed lights and grandiose music – is also on its way out. "Younger couples find it cheesy and outdated," he says. "They would rather spend their entertainment budget on a live band."

According to Lau, a live band can

cost between HK\$15,000 and HK\$30,000, while Mills estimates that the cost of a dinner banquet for 25 to 35 tables can start from HK\$1 million.

"People are getting smarter with how they spend. They want to get more out of their wedding than just a dining experience," Mills says.

"These clients opt for a destination function with dinners planned over a few days, as well as a fishing trip on location, or even a spa day for the women."

The couple can tie-in the honeymoon to the wedding and stay behind at the destination after all the guests have left.

For couples who want to keep things in Hong Kong, private clubhouses, restaurants and even homes have become increasingly popular as wedding locations.

"People, nowadays, are a lot more open to things that wow," Mills says. "Provided that it's tasteful and the venue permits it, couples are paying for everything from fireworks and fire dancers, to flame throwers and traditional Chinese acrobats."

Wedding favours are another area in which creative couples are leaving their mark. Local luxury chocolate brand Vero has classed up the traditional gift with bespoke chocolates, tailor-made to suit the couple's personalities and tastes.

Mills remembers a couple who gave each guest an iPod nano which had a list of their favourite music and a video clip of the wedding.

Some customs seem to be staying put. "Sadly, shark's fin soup is not going anywhere," Lau says. "One of the reasons has to do with face – Chinese couples want to show that they are treating their guests well."

However, Mills says environmentally aware couples are substituting shark's fin soup with other luxury options such as bird's nest soup or abalone.

Wedding invitations are also here to stay. While e-vites have been gaining in popularity, Mills says there is nothing quite like a traditional, personalised invitation.

"By extending a formal invitation to your guest, you are showing them a sign of respect," she says. "More importantly, you are also conveying the message that their

attendance is what will make your wedding special."

Some couples will substitute shark's fin soup with other luxury options.

Photo: Jade Garden



Daring to



Couples are turning their back on tradition to ensure their wedding is unique, writes **Jacqueline Tsang**

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