



Two-Ring CIRCO

Bridal couples today are looking for show-stopping feats of festivity. Here's your go-to guide for making sure you, and the floral decor, make it to the center ring.

BY MARY WESTBROOK



In Seattle, a couple says “I do” in a rustic-themed ceremony in a historic building, when suddenly a brass street band starts playing — saxophones, tubas and trumpets blaring — marching through the crowd, pulling guests into their procession, leading them to the reception, Pied Piper style.

At a resort in Newport Coast, California, a blissful couple sways elegantly to the final notes of their first song as a married couple, only to be interrupted by the raucous, joyful entry of the University of Southern California’s marching band, dispatched to get guests fired up for a major party.

Simple vow exchanges? Not so much. When every brunch and barre class is celebrated with an Instagram post, you better believe the bar is higher for actual important occasions (read: weddings). Indeed, couples are pulling out all the Weddings today are a multi-vendor operation — with bands (even, yes, marching bands), photo booths, tattoo artists — joining the party and fighting for their share of the budget. Gone are the simple days of hiring a caterer, photographer and florist. Couples want MORE and the more you can do for them means the bigger your cut of the nuptial budget.

To ensure florists and flowers still play a central role in the full-scale production that is a wedding, we went straight to the source. Since 1996, The Knot has dished ideas to brides (and increasingly grooms, too) about all things wedding. Today The Knot reaches eight out of 10 brides in America (more than 11 million monthly unique visitors) across 360 platforms online and in print.

What’s happening in weddings isn’t necessarily about more money. Budgets are on track to be only slightly higher in

2016: Spending was up by half a percentage point for the third quarter of 2015, according to The Wedding Report, a research company that tracks and forecasts wedding information, with budgets hovering around \$26,600, compared to \$26,444 in 2014. (The Knot’s latest wedding survey, conducted in 2014, pegs budgets higher, at \$31,213.)

The real story, according to Lauren Kay, senior style editor at The Knot, isn’t necessarily how much couples are spending but how they are dividing their budgets. The big winner? Anything and everything that enhances what Kay terms the “guest experience.” Turns out, today’s brides and grooms are often looking for ways to be very good hosts.

“Couples are excited to celebrate with their family and friends and really want their wedding to be the best day ever, not just for them, but for their guests, too,” Kay said. “They want their friends and family to have a great time — from the food to the dancing and the parting favor.”

That’s where those marching bands come in, and the custom gift bags, the late-night sliders. The details make the night unforgettable, and florists who align their wedding marketing efforts and sales pitches with couples’ desires to entertain like the best of ‘em stand a much greater chance of getting a bigger piece of that wedding budget. This month, we turned to Kay for some insight on major trends and then asked two seasoned wedding florists for help translating those ideas into everyday advice that any florist can use.



WILDEST DREAMS

Cut-out silhouettes, custom dance floors and artistic chalkboard renderings are no problem for Mandy Majerik, AIFD, PFCI, of HotHouse Design Studio in Birmingham, Alabama, who recently opened a prop business to complement her wedding studio.

THE DEMAND: Attention

THE DELIVERY: Extreme Personalization

We know. We know. No bride has ever come in and asked for a generic or cookie-cutter experience. They demand the personalized. But the effort couples now exert to stand out, and the attention they pay to even very small aspects of their celebration, are things you should note and make use of, said Kay.

"This is the **single biggest trend and the most universal** — no matter the couple, **everyone is looking for a custom celebration** that's reflective of them," Kay said. "This wedding tells the story of the couple from start to finish, from the invite to the cake. **Cultural customs, religious traditions and favorite tastes and interests seep into every detail.**"

Including entertainment, Kay said. Why have a bar when you can have a **mixologist** charming your guests with custom drinks? Kay also knows of weddings where the couple supplemented the traditional documentarians (photographer, videographer) with "someone **live-painting** the wedding."

Personalization is no longer about having monogrammed or color-coordinated cocktail napkins, Kay said. Instead, "all the details are reflective of the cou-

ple, from the **main dishes** they serve at dinner to the **flowers in the bride's bouquet** and the **theme of the after-party.**" (Yep. No more sojourning to the hotel bar. Many weddings will have an after-party and it will have a theme.)

Overall, couples are "spending on elements that enhance the guest experience, like **contemporary choirs** or other unique musical performances, delicious food including **late night snacks**, and memorable **welcome bags or favors.**" Kay said.

That often translates to **more money** going toward the most guest-friendly spaces, including reception areas. The Knot 2014 Real Weddings Study found that **couples are spending more on their catering, musicians and cake.** Spending for **cocktail hours** also rose. On the other hand, couples are spending less on the ceremony. In 2014, 33 percent of couples hired pianists and organists for their ceremony, down from

49 percent in 2009, and 28 percent of couples held their ceremony in a religious institution, down from 41 percent in 2009.

Work on this: "Customization is a very integral part of weddings," said Mandy Majerik, AIFD, PFCI of HotHouse Design Studio in Birmingham, Alabama. Majerik, who opened a sister business, PropHouse in 2013, to accommodate her growing prop business, said florists have to offer "more than just your typical floral centerpieces" and **incorporate detailed questions** into consultation forms to truly dig in (and find out how to fit in and profit from those extra details). After all, if a bride can dream it up and pay for it, Majerik can make it happen. "We offer several options **for artistically written menus** on mirrors or **signature drinks on chalkboards**, etc.," she said. "We have also had **custom pillows, aisle runners** and **dance floors** made for the couple. I often **use their invitation for inspiration.**"



SING IT

"Everyone is looking for a custom celebration that's reflective of them," which can include unexpected entertainment, said Lauren Kay, senior style editor at The Knot.



DOG DAYS Some couples are hiring multiple experts to make sure the wedding goes smoothly. Lauren Kay, of The Knot, has even heard of people hiring animal trainers for four-legged ring bearers.



FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

Zoë Prosser Gallina of Botanica International Design & Décor Studio in Tampa, Florida, pictured with a local wedding planner. “We love the relationships we’ve created with some of our wedding planners, they become friends,” she said.

THE DEMAND:
Just do it — so I don’t have to
THE DELIVERY:
Done and done!

Do-it-yourself weddings are far from dead, but Kay said she and her colleagues see increasing and newfound appreciation among brides for wedding vendors and planners. Occasionally, they even want to bring in multiple experts when it comes to planning and running the day.

“If couples need a hand executing any element of the wedding day that falls out of the realm of traditional planner duties, they now hire someone,” Kay said. “**Couples are unloading their least favorite wedding tasks on specialists, from live-tweeting the wedding day to training their four-legged ring bearer — yes, really.**”

Data from The Wedding Report supports Kay’s point, extending it to wedding planners: **52 percent of couples hire a planner, and 43 percent say they prefer full-service wedding coordinators over the services of a coordinator who comes in for day-of or month-of planning services.**

“Couples have heard enough horror stories now, and seen enough of their friends’ weddings planned to perfection, to finally get it,” according to The Wedding Report. **“Wedding planners are important. Very important.** So they want the many advantages of working with one, fully and completely, from start to finish. Budgets are now stronger, and couples are more willing to invest in the services of a great wedding coordinator, which is excellent news for wedding pros.”

Work on this: If you aren’t already doing so — it’s high time to get in good with local wedding planners. “We get the majority of our business and our largest weddings from wedding planners,” said Zoë Prosser Gallina of Botanica International Design & Décor Studio in Tampa, Florida. (And she does mean large. Botanica has a super lux reputation with average floral and

decor budgets running \$15,000, and even higher than that for its Ian Prosser Productions arm.) “It’s important to **go beyond the world of professionally networking** and get to know each planner on a personal level. Whether it’s **having lunch**, taking them to **coffee** or cocktails,” said Gallina, a former wedding planner herself. “Planners want to know that, professionally, you’ll provide a great product and service and that, personally, you’ll be someone wonderful to work with.” How do you get that foot in the door if you aren’t already warm and cozy? “Offer to **partner with them on a photo shoot** or a small event providing your services complimentary — that way you can give them that firsthand experience of how well you work and the product and design you are capable of,” Gallina suggested. (Last year, Floral Management talked to a bunch of top wedding planners. Read that story at safnow.org/moreonline.)



BE FRIENDLY “Social media is everything these days,” said Zoë Prosser Gallina of Botanica International Design & Décor Studio in Tampa, Florida. She interacts regularly with her brides through social media.

THE DEMAND:
Must. Be. Trending

THE DELIVERY:
Tighten up your tech

Ceremony pics posted to social media before the couple kisses. Drones buzzing overhead. GoPro cameras in bouquets. Welcome to (some) weddings in 2016. Technology and weddings is “a hot topic” right now, Kay said — and not everyone agrees on what the new standard should be.

“Some couples love the idea of sharing their wedding with friends and family who couldn’t make it, creating a **custom hashtag** or even **live streaming their ceremony**,” she said. “Others are taking the opposite approach and **asking guests to pocket their phones** and really be present for the celebration.”

Among those couples who can’t get enough of technology, **drones**, which can capture awesome aerial photography, are gaining in popularity,” Kay said, “along with **3D printing** to create perfect cake toppers and even bridal jewelry and groomsman cuff links,” Kay said.

(For its part, The Wedding Report noted that 40 percent of its survey takers said “no way” to having a drone on-site; however, the fact that the question is asked at all is a sign of the times.)

Technology is also present throughout the planning process. The Knot study found that in 2014, the use of smartphones to access **wedding planning websites** nearly doubled from 2011 (33 percent) to 2014 (61 percent).

At that time, about six out of 10 brides actively planned their weddings through their mobile device — a number that’s likely even higher today.

Work on this: *Still* dragging your feet on social media? Better get moving. “Social media is everything these days,” Gallina said. “I can’t tell you how many brides bring in **screenshots of images they’ve found** of something on social media. It’s a great tool to also showcase any different elements that set you apart from perhaps what you’re known for. If people consider you to be very high end, showcase an image of simpler decor every now and then. If you’re known for more romantic designs, post a picture of a modern design for a stark contrast.” Majerik regularly polls brides to see where they find her business. The No. 1 response? Instagram. That’s why she focuses a lot of energy on the site, and continues the conversation with brides there. “We do ask for the **couple’s hash tag** and when we post something about their wedding online, we definitely use their hash tag,” she said. “Almost 100 percent of the time, they will comment below about how fabulous and perfect the flowers were. You can’t get much better than that!” Majerik also sends out a thank you email **requesting that brides go and review** the business online. “A nice review is the best thank you they can give us,” she said.

THE RING MASTERS

Mandy Majerik, AIFD, PFCI,



Owner and principle designer, HotHouse Design Studio and PropHouse Birmingham, Alabama

- No. of weddings per year: 150
- Avg. floral and decor budget: \$8,000

Zoë Prosser Gallina

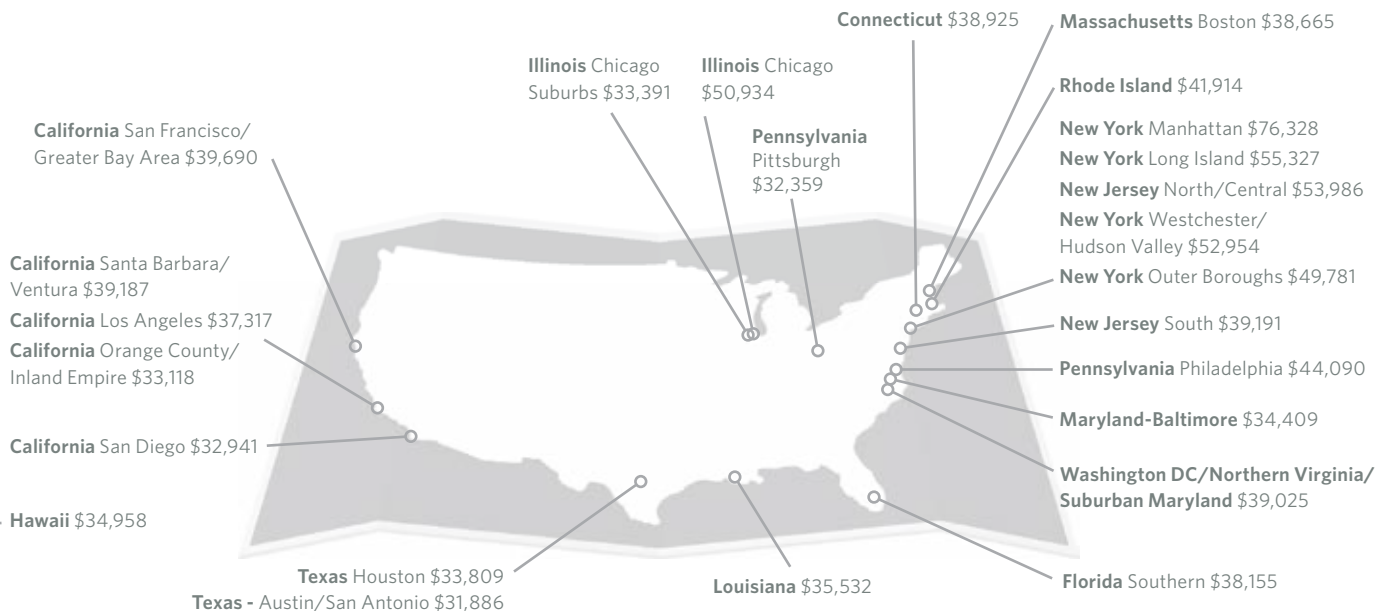


Creative Director, Botanica International Design & Decor Studio Tampa, Florida

- No. of weddings per year: 125
- Avg. floral and decor budget: \$15,000

TOP 25 MOST EXPENSIVE PLACES TO GET MARRIED

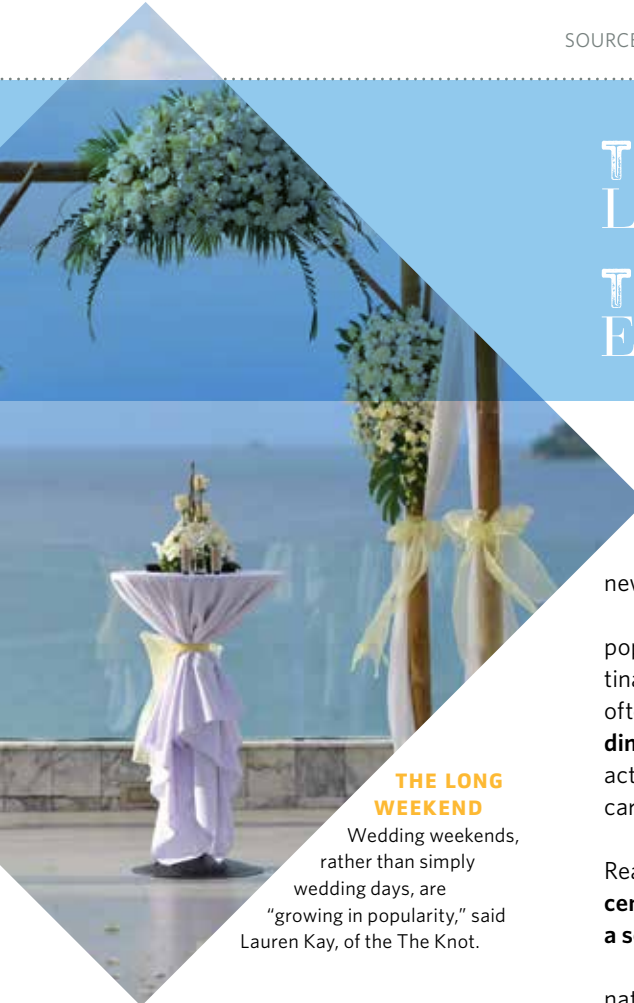
Based on average cost of a wedding in 2014, couples spend the most on their weddings in the following areas in the U.S. Five of the six most expensive areas to get married are in the New York/Tri-State area.



SOURCE: THE KNOT 2014 REAL WEDDINGS STUDY

THE DEMAND: Let's make this (wedding) last forever

THE DELIVERY: Endurance and endless ideas



THE LONG WEEKEND

Wedding weekends, rather than simply wedding days, are "growing in popularity," said Lauren Kay, of the The Knot.

Often, the desire for a highly memorable and personal affair can lead to a longer one, too. That's good news for wedding vendors, said Kay.

"**Wedding weekends** are growing in popularity, and many of them aren't destination affairs," Kay noted. "Couples will often **host a welcome cocktail hour or dinner** followed by a roster of organized activities... Each event is planned with careful detail."

In fact, Kay noted, The Knot 2014 Real Weddings Study shows that **37 percent of couples close the weekend with a send-off brunch.**

Work on this: Extra events are a natural place for additional floral designs, but couples may not think to mention them during your consulta-

tion — so be sure to cover that ground, said Gallina. "**Ask about any additional events** that they have taking place to see if there is anything you can help take care of for them," she said. "If they are having multiple events over a weekend, **explain to them the importance of making each event different** from the next so they create different 'experiences' for their guests throughout the entire weekend." The key, stresses Majerik, is the word "ask." Remember, she said, "You have to ask for the sale. During the consultation, have a reminder to ask about **after-rehearsal dinners, bridesmaid luncheons, brunches,**" she said. "Many families are relieved to know you can do more things than just the wedding."



RIP MARRIAGE? NOT SO FAST.

Millennials are the country's largest living generation ... but are they turning their backs on the institution of marriage? Some experts predict the country's marriage rate will be at its lowest level in 2016.

"Millennials are such a big generation, we're going to have more people of prime marriage age in the next five years than we've had at any time in U.S. history. For that alone, we'd expect an uptick in marriage rates," Sam Sturgeon, president of Demographic Intelligence, told The Washington Post last year. "[But] that's not happening."

Behind the shift? Changing social norms, including a more secular society. Many millennials are perfectly content to cohabitate, and not marry.

But the idea that millennials aren't getting married is overstated, according to The U.S. Wedding Report, which notes that weddings for college-educated women rose from 30 percent in 2008 to 36 percent in 2015. In addition, the growth of the Hispanic population should propel the percentage of Hispanic brides from 15 percent in 2008 to 18 percent this year, according to Demographic Intelligence. Monitoring the Future, an ongoing survey of youths, also reports that 80 percent of female high school seniors and 72 percent of males in 2006 to 2010

said marriage and family are "extremely important" to them.

A number of factors do set millennials apart as wedding clients, say experts.

"More and more weddings are being paid for by the couple too, at least in some part," said Lauren Kay, senior style editor at The Knot. "In fact, as of 2014, 92 percent of couples contribute to paying for their wedding. As a result, couples feel more empowered to make their own decisions and celebrate their uniqueness."

Millennials also tend to be less tied to traditions, said Jessica English of Apple Brides, a regional wedding blog for couples in the Pacific Northwest. "Millennials want what they want, regardless of what an older generation, or tradition, says it should be," she said. "Whether that's a black dress instead of white, or food trucks instead of a served, four-course meal, millennials want their wedding to reflect their personalities and relationship."

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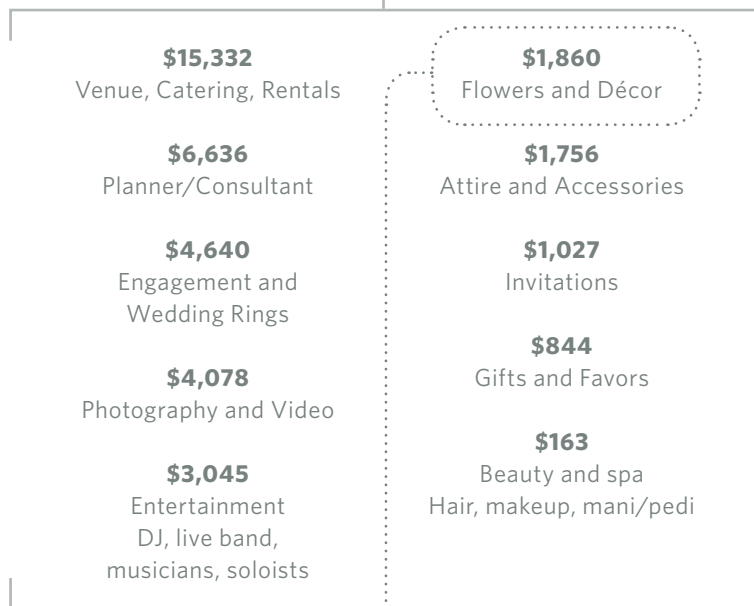
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Color	Petals	Awards
Peach	58	

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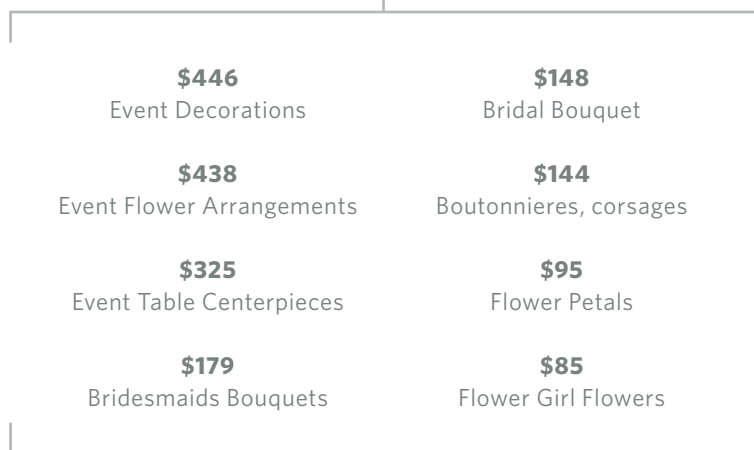
WHAT ARE BRIDAL COUPLES SPENDING?

\$26,645



THE FLOWER BUDGET

\$1,860



SOURCE: AVERAGE WEDDING EXPENDITURES IN 2015, BASED ON 8,010 SURVEY SAMPLES COLLECTED BY THE WEDDING REPORT IN 2015.



JAMES CHRISTIANSON PHOTOGRAPHER, COURTESY THE KNOT

THE DEMAND:
Conscience
coupling

THE DELIVERY:
Authenticity

No question about it: **“Provenance is important to millennials,”** said Kay.

“Couples are paying close attention to where things come from, from the chicken they serve at dinner to the stems in their centerpieces,” she explained. “We are **seeing an interest in where the flowers came from across the board,** similar to the local food movement.”

More couples are choosing **in-season, local stems** for their bouquets and arrangements, Kay explained. “And we are seeing a lot of **unexpected elements make their way into florals too, like pomegranates, artichokes, kumquats and kale.**” (Many of these elements find their way onto the dinner menu, too.)

According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, more couples are including **a charitable aspect to their weddings,** forgoing gifts or giving a donation in honor of a loved one or a guest. Candy

NATURAL WORLD Lauren Kay (inset) of The Knot said couples are paying more attention to where flowers come from — and embracing a more “natural” look.



Culver, director of marketing at the I Do Foundation, told the Chronicle in April 2015 that 242,000 couples have used the website to create charity registries — a twist on the traditional gift-giving mechanism — since it was created in 2002. And, since 2011, the I Do Foundation, a division of the online-giving site JustGive, has seen a 130 percent increase in users and a 75 percent increase in the amount raised per registry.

Work on this: Brides may express interest in local flowers but what they really want is their dream look, Majerik said. “Our brides **aren’t as concerned as to the sourcing** as they are to achieving the overall look — wherever they have to come from.” Still, don’t forget to take time to educate your brides about flowers, where they come from and how they’re grown, when appropriate, and also what they mean. As for giving back, Majerik and Gallina both say they find that brides are interested in the prospect of **donating their flowers after the wedding**. “We offer the service to pick up the florals and then we have connections that will go and deliver to these places. The couples just like to know that someone else gets to enjoy them,” Majerik said. 🌸

Mary Westbrook is senior contributing editor for the Society of American Florists. mwestbrook@safnow.org

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