



Raising the Bar

A serial wedding attendee shares the one tip you need for the perfect fete **by Michael Callahan**

So I just got back from Memphis, where I attended my friends Jason and Erin's wedding. And the first—in fact, the only—question everyone asked me when I got back wasn't about the weather (warm but lovely), the sights (the walking ducks at the Peabody Hotel—so fun!) or Elvis (still dead, no matter what the *Weekly World News* says). No, what everyone wanted to know was: "So, how was the wedding?"

Like vacation weather and the Academy Awards telecast, weddings have become something we rate on a sort of sliding scale of viewer enjoyment. And if you've been to as many weddings as I have, you've seen it all, from the ridiculous (my uncle's pants falling down as he walked my cousin down the aisle) to the sublime (the vodka-and-caviar station at a co-worker's bash). All talked about, gossiped about, and now, years later, remembered in whimsical anecdotes.

You may not care what any of us, your audience, actually think of the grand performance that is your wedding—it's your day, as you are (rightfully) told again and again. But still, it might be in your best interest to consider what your guests will discuss at, say, your 25th wedding anniversary gala. Because wouldn't it be better if the verdict of history was, "Man, that was an amazing wedding!"?

So, on behalf of all of the guests who are going to buy new threads, gifts off your registry, and possibly plane tickets and hotel rooms to witness your whirl in white, let me offer my number one, my most important, my end-all, be-all of (perhaps unsolicited) advice on how to throw the perfect wedding:

Hire enough bartenders.

Yes, it will help if the food is delicious (and hot), the band is lively (and does not play "Shout"), and your bevy of bridesmaids doesn't look like a parade of Marie Antoinettes. (Repeat after me: Audrey Hepburn. Audrey Hepburn.) And it will be nice if the ceremony has a touching reading or poem (but please, no Frost—it's tired already), preferably recited by someone who can actually *read*. But trust me: Nothing makes or breaks a wedding like booze. Flowing pours available from a line never more than two guests deep keep everyone happy; stingy samplings retrieved after spending 20 minutes in line make everyone grumpy (and resentful). Your guests will forgive a lot—including that rambling toast from the best man that is way TMI about the groom's college days—if you just keep them in liquid.

The verdict from the masses at Jason and Erin's wedding: raves. A spectacular setting on the grounds of an old museum, a funky Tennessee band, and heaping mounds of soul food (fried chicken, lip-smacking ribs, mac-and-cheese, tangy baked beans) that had us all swooning at our candlelit Martha Stewart-y tables. And most important, two deft bartenders who kept us all blissfully (and sometimes woozily) hydrated.

In the end, does what we thought matter? Maybe not. In the end, your wedding is the one day on which everyone's job is to fawn all over you no matter what you do. So you want to dress your attendants like Lady Gaga? Have off-key Aunt Mildred sing from *Phantom of the Opera*? Do the Hokey Pokey? By all means, go right ahead.

But trust me on the bar thing.