

# Catering magazine

the magazine for catering professionals

WHEN BIGGER GETS EVEN BETTER

## extravagant large events

FEATURING  
trendsetting  
california cuisine





Three award-winners from the recent Wisconsin Restaurant Expo explain their design approach

*"Let's Go Green!" won the People's Choice competition.*

## create a winning tabletop

If you attended the Wisconsin Restaurant Expo in Milwaukee in March, you no doubt noticed the seven lavishly decorated tables vying for an award in the Tabletop Design Competition. Since the contest debuted at the Expo three years ago, it's become one of the most popular destinations on the show floor, according to Dawn Faris, exposition director.

"The extravagant displays are so visually interesting that they definitely get a lot of attention," says Faris. "We see a lot of people taking photos so they can refer back to them to spark inspiration for their restaurant or catering business."

More than 2,100 attendees voted in the People's Choice competition. That honor was awarded to the "Let's Go Green!" table by Imagen Events in Pewaukee, Wis., and Jess Fleur Fun in Waukesha, Wis. The elegant table design featured many natural décor elements, including small wood chips, shells and pieces of bark.

"This theme was not created; it evolved," explains Lori Huntington, owner of Imagen Events. "When we create, it is very organic."

Huntington knew she wanted to use the leopard-print fabric and gold Chiavari chairs, while Linda Villalobos and Mindy Rutta of Jess Fleur Fun had recently acquired the

large, metal branchlike structure that ended up in the middle of the table. Starting with those items as their base, the trio collected bits and pieces they thought would enhance the design, including black tableware from a dollar store and birch logs from Rutta's backyard that ended up as pedestals for LED pillar candles. Huntington twisted the chair ties to mimic vines.

"We all agreed we would love to sit down at this table," says Huntington. "The table itself would contribute to the interaction of an event, and the experience of the guests."

Huntington takes the same approach when designing tables for her clients. "The first rule I like to follow is that it has to lend feeling and enhancement to the event," she says. "Before I can design décor and tables, I have to understand my client. How do they want their guests to feel? What would they like them to experience?"

Huntington focuses on colors and textures in her designs, endeavoring to make each event a reflection of her client's personality.

"I encourage clients to add a bit of whimsy," says Huntington. "There needs to be something unexpected in décor, something that makes your guests smile."

### Playing Their Cards Right

Whimsical elements were in abundance in another award-winning table at the Expo. "Casino in Wonderland"—which won the Most Innovative and Best Use of Theme honors from the competition's two judges—incorporated many clever nods

They created a bright, eye-catching display, with table linens the color of the Cheshire Cat, an elevated table with high-back barstools, a chair inspired by the Depp movie that rested on stacks of books, and a moss-covered teapot and top hat created from foam.

to Lewis Carroll's children's fantasy, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The menu cards read "Eat Me," a teapot read "Drink Me," and the centerpieces seemed to explode with playing cards.

Featuring playing cards in the décor came naturally to the designers, a team from Milwaukee's Potawatomi Bingo Casino, a 784,000-square-foot gaming destination that attracts nearly 6 million visitors annually. "The casino is celebrating its 20th birthday, so we were trying to figure out how to incorporate the casino theme," says Kaelyn Cervero, catering operations manager. "We started with the Mad Hatter tea party concept, then decided to go with 'Casino in Wonderland,' focusing on the cards and the Queen of Hearts."

The team worked for a month and a half

honing the concept, re-reading the novel and watching the Disney classic cartoon movie as well as the recent Johnny Depp film. By brainstorming and drawing on whiteboards, they created a bright, eye-catching display, with table linens the color of the Cheshire Cat, an elevated table with high-back barstools, a chair inspired by the Depp movie that rested on stacks of books, and a moss-covered teapot and top hat created from foam.

Cervero and her team create themed parties every month for the casino's high rollers, when they routinely employ similar imaginative techniques. In March, for a St. Patrick's Day theme, gold Dupioni linens draped the room and gold coins hung from the ceiling. Last month for the "April Showers" theme, Cervero was inspired by a photo of umbrellas hanging from the ceiling. She planned to utilize lighting treatments to create the illusion of rain in the ballroom, with bold splashes of color—hot-pink and orange umbrellas, orange tulips and cotton-candy-hued fabrics—promising the arrival of spring.

In general, says Cervero, she and her team coordinate the event design around the linens they choose. "We've got a lot of groups trying to figure out how to do things on a budget, so we try to pick one factor and go big with it," she says. "Usually we try



The "Casino in Wonderland" table tipped a hat to the Lewis Carroll fantasy.

to go big with the linens, since they make the biggest impact when guests walk in the room." The casino rents their linens, and she credits her vendors with being flexible and helpful when it comes to choosing the right ones. For example, the casino hosted a large Venetian-themed New Year's Eve party for the "high rollers of the high rollers." Cervero wanted distinctive, memorable linens for the event. She sent the event's color palette to the casino's primary linen supplier, who found a wholesaler to custom-design the linens for the party.

"To have vendors that act like partners is very important," says Cervero.

### Jewel of a Table

Kris Mosier, director of catering at the Crowne Plaza Milwaukee West, designed her award-winning table around a fabric that inspired her. "I originally thought about designing a tropical theme with different shades of blue and green, since I have many

couples who have had destination weddings, with their receptions back home in Wisconsin," says Mosier. "While looking at different linen options, I came across a sample of Tiffany satin and instantly decided to change direction, since my daughter and I are huge fans of Audrey Hepburn and the movie 'Breakfast at Tiffany's.'"

Mosier's classically elegant table, awarded the prize for Most Viable, features the robin's egg blue hue Tiffany & Co. famously uses on their boxes and shopping bags. She offset the blue with white linens and accents, and classic tableware, with favor boxes designed to look like those from the iconic jewelry store.

When designing tables, Mosier follows three rules. For one, "pretty or elaborate does not always outweigh functional," she says. "I've had countless events where guests have removed a centerpiece so that they were able to socialize across the table. Centerpieces should either be above or



## Latest Looks

Searching for something new to try in your table designs? Try these recently released products from companies that rent and sell table linens.

**BURLEXE**, a new linen line from rental company Chair Covers & Linens, combines the look and neutral color of burlap with a fine-linen feel. It's available in table linens, table runners and sashes. [www.LinenHero.com](http://www.LinenHero.com)



Linen N Stuff recently debuted the **CHIAVARI CHAIR CAP WITH RUFFLES**, made from 100% nylon/polyester. The cap, available for purchase, is machine-washable and offered in a wide range of colors. [www.linennstuff.com](http://www.linennstuff.com)





*Tiffany blue graced the "Most Viable" award-winner.*



below eye level, or transparent."

In addition, Mosier recommends to her clients that they utilize linens and décor that represent their personalities, to make their event stand out from the crowd. Finally, Mosier stresses, "sometimes less is more. Make sure that if you are choosing several colors, you don't go overboard and end up with a carnival atmosphere, unless that is the theme of your event." ●

**THE TABLEVOGUE** debuted last year, providing a tailored, full-length cover for folding banquet and card tables. Available for purchase, the product is made of machine-washable, soil-resistant polyester, and is offered in natural, white and limited-edition classic red. [www.tablevogue.com](http://www.tablevogue.com)



Event Products by Howard Elliott sells this new **MIRRORED TABLE TOP** directly to the trade. The four-piece set is designed to fit a 60-inch table. [www.eventproductsbyhec.com](http://www.eventproductsbyhec.com)

A-1 Tablecloth sells and rents the new **CHOPIN** fabric, shown here in black and silver. The bottle cap and matte satin barrel cloth products are both custom-manufactured and for purchase only. [www.a1tablecloth.com](http://www.a1tablecloth.com)



Ultimate Textile's new **MAJESTIC** is proving so popular that it's now offered for sale in 29 colors. The 120-inch wide reversible fabric is Dupioni on one side and satin on the other. Ultimate Textile also reduced "Buy the Case" pricing on 120-wide duchess satin and poly-stripe. [www.ultimatetextile.com](http://www.ultimatetextile.com)