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THE WAIT IS OVER!
JAN. 27...
CHOW!

Eugene Weekly's Restaurant Guide
Chow! features reviews of area eateries and a directory of Eugene and Corvallis restaurants.

Ad reservation deadline is Friday, Jan. 21st by 5pm.
Contact Mark Frisbee 484-0519 ext. 12

Just Dessert?

The wedding cake is more than a sweet treat.

BY JESSICA MacMURRAY BLAINE

"How tall is he?" I asked, repeating her question, completely confused.

"Yes," responded the woman taking my order for a wedding cake. "And how tall are you? And will you be wearing heels?"

She went on, and on. These were not questions I had expected to have to answer. But the Cake Police, as we'll call her, wanted to know. She also wanted to know the name of the caterer, the band, the florist, where the food would be served and more.

I had come prepared with a different set of answers: almond poppyseed, 180, July 26. Obviously, I had no idea how complex the cake was. It required a reservation at least six months in advance, two days of setup, coordination with the florist, planning of the photographs and a contract. I thought it was just a dessert.

But look into the wide world of bridal magazines, websites, books and the million other places one is supposed to go for advice on these matters, and it's immediately clear that a wedding cake is a complex beast. Cake designers offer models and sketches. Planners offer explanations of traditions passed through the centuries: old symbolism behind the towering layers, the first slice, the feeding of one another.

There is a reason why a traditional wedding cake is such a production: It's not just a dessert. It's not just a wedding symbol. It's not just a photo opp. It's all of those things, plus a massive logistical effort on the part of the cake handler.

Medieval English brides and grooms had to kiss over a tower of sweet rolls, symbolizing wealth and plentiful children, without knocking it over. A typical groom in ancient Rome broke a loaf of bread over the bride's head to symbolize deflowering her. Simultaneous slicing and feeding each other has come to symbolize the team effort in marriage, the bounty to come, the support each spouse will offer the other.

As it is in all things wedding, these supposedly helpful resources also offer checklists, timelines and the admonition that your cake should be the perfect representation of your Personal Style.

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Decorative arts notwithstanding, cake people have to balance refrigeration and display, coordination with florists and caterers, and a host of other niggling details. All that in addition to the semi-heroic feat of assembling a cake that is not only 3 or 4 feet tall



Bakers at Sweet Life customize wedding cakes. Sweet Life custom cakes start at \$155 for a cake serving 40.

with columns and flowers and who knows what else, but durable enough to survive it until you're ready to cut it. Let's not forget, it has to be edible too.

Face it. Most wedding receptions are coordinated by people whose emotions are just a teeny bit heightened. Little logistical issues such as a slightly-melted cake decora-

tion, a poorly-sited spot for cutting, or a cake that arrives at the reception as everyone's leaving, can become fraught with meaning when it's the Big Day. It's a lot to manage. So it's no wonder that the cake and its associated parts can end up costing more than \$1,000.

But alternatives abound. What if you don't want to pay \$10 per slice for every person at your wedding, knowing full well that many won't even touch their plates? How does the almighty Personal Style translate into dessert for 100? What if you're not even sure that you want cake?

The alternatives are vast, and a good cake person (or caterer) will help you explore them. Order a small, fabulous single-tier for you and your sweetie to cut in public while the caterer dishes out sheet cake for your guests from behind the scenes. Up on a pedestal and decorated well, a small cake can be just as lovely. Or have a tower of cupcakes, or chocolates, or éclairs, or chocolate-chip cookies.

The good news is, it's your wedding and you can do whatever you want. Just don't tell the Cake Police. ♥