What to consider for planning a great bridal shower

ARIELLA FLATT
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

A bridal shower is one of the best ways to celebrate a bride-to-be, providing the perfect opportunity for her friends and family to get to know each other before the big day while enjoying games, sweets and more. For those who have been given the honour of hosting a shower, planning the details of the soirée may be a daunting task. However, if the host settles on the basic elements of the day, including guest list, venue, menu, décor and activities, the party will begin to take shape and will ultimately form an event that both the attendees and the bride-to-be will remember fondly.

The Budget
Before anything else can be planned for the fête, a budget must be established. Whether the event is paid for by a team of people or by a single host, it must be decided upon before decorations are purchased and caterers are hired.

The Guest List
Constructing the guest list for a bridal shower is sometimes a source of stress for brides who want to include everyone while keeping the event intimate. Though it is usually expected that those who are invited to the bridal shower will later be invited to the wedding, some brides choose to defy this unwritten rule, especially if the wedding itself will be a smaller-scale event.

The Date
Depending on the length of the couple’s engagement period, bridal showers can be held anytime from six months to a few weeks before the wedding day. Having the party about two months before the wedding builds anticipation without adding stress for the bride and her family as the big day approaches.

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Cut honeymoon costs by accumulating credit card points

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The last thing anyone’s wallet needs after absorbing the cost of a wedding is another large expense, and yet, that’s exactly what many people are faced with when they inevitably want to celebrate their new union by leaving their workaday lives behind and jetting off on a honeymoon.

One of the best ways to see another part of the world and still hang on to some money is to redeem rewards points for free travel, and one of the best ways to collect these points is to apply for new credit cards with large sign-up bonuses.

Yes, the same pieces of plastic that are used to pay for travel can actually help defray some of the biggest costs associated with vacationing. Let’s focus on a few offerings from American Express.

Amex’s Gold Rewards card offers new users a welcome bonus of 25,000 points in its membership rewards program after spending $1,500 on the card within the first three months of card membership. Those points can be exchanged for a free flight (excluding taxes and fees) through Amex’s travel program, or can be transferred to another travel rewards program, such as Aeroplan, where 25,000 points is enough for a round-trip long-haul flight between Canada and the continental United States. (Aeroplan’s program also allows a stopover on a multi-city itinerary without adding any extra points, enabling members to fly from, say, Toronto to San Diego to Houston and back to Toronto for 25,000 points and as little as $78 in taxes and fees per person.)

Credit cards can also help offset another of travel’s largest costs: accommodation. For example, after completing $1,500 of purchases on the Marriott Bonvoy card, also offered by American Express, card members will receive an extra 50,000 Marriott rewards points. (Marriott acquired the Starwood chain in 2016 and merged their reward programs in August 2018.) This points bonanza is redeemable for free nights at the hotel chain’s 6,700 properties across the globe, and can be used for as little as one night at a luxury resort, such as a Ritz-Carlton, or as many as six nights at more modest lodgings, like Courtyard or Fairfield Inn locations.

(This latter reward could even be stretched for one additional complimentary night, as Marriott offers members a free fifth night when redeeming for four consecutive nights.)

But there are ways to reap even heftier bonuses. Amex offers business owners and those signing up via a referral lucrative awards of up to 75,000 points, redeemable for travel to select destinations in Europe, and nearly enough for a round-trip ticket to Israel. Couples looking to take advantage of these methods for their honeymoon travel can double-dip by one partner referring the other, thereby generating a referral bonus for both.

An added benefit is the package of travel-related insurance included with many of these cards, such as coverage for emergencies, trip interruption, lost baggage and theft or damage to rental cars. These embedded extras negate the need for card holders to purchase separate insurance, potentially saving hundreds of dollars. Of course, it’s important to read the terms and conditions associated with the individual card, as using points may disqualify the holder from taking advantage of this coverage.

This scheme, though, is not without its pitfalls, chief among them being the amount of money that needs to be spent to qualify for these rewards, as well as the annual fees associated with the cards.

However, the period from engagement to honeymoon is an ideal time to plan and put this strategy into action. From towels to bed sheets, pots, pans and kitchen appliances, the costs of setting up a new household can really add up. Some wedding vendors may even allow their services to be paid for with plastic.

As for the cards’ annual fees, that consideration must be weighed against the total costs that would otherwise be associated with travelling to a desired destination. Generally, there will be an opportunity that makes this an attractive option, but as often stated on travel rewards blogs and forums, your mileage may vary.
Tom’s Place is the place to be in June

June is full of happy occasions. Whether it’s a wedding, graduation or just the fact that the weather has finally improved, people are ready to celebrate.

The Mihalik family, in particular, has much to celebrate this month. Tom Mihalik, owner of men’s clothing shop Tom’s Place, turns 63 on June 7. His sister, Anett Alves, whom customers will find at the front of the store, marks her birthday on June 9. And Tom Jr.’s special day is June 13. Then, of course, there’s Father’s Day on June 16.

On June 8, the store will carry on its tradition of sharing the joy, with live music, food, a birthday cake and great deals.

Tom’s will also continue its custom of giving away gift certificates, this year valued at $163 to coincide with Mihalik’s 63rd birthday. The certificate will be awarded to one lucky person who logs on to the store’s Facebook page (@TomsPlaceTO) to wish Mihalik a happy birthday!

“Whether you’re attending a formal function or just want to look your best on a patio, Tom’s has the look to fit the occasion – and to fit you.

While black is classic, spring presents the opportunity for more colour, especially in sports jackets. Blue is ubiquitous, and will also be giving away a gift certificate.

The form-fitting look is on trend, but Tom’s offers suitable fits for all builds. You don’t need a custom suit to get a perfect fit. When it comes to alterations, Tom’s staff are experts at fitting and there are eight to 10 tailors manning a full tailor shop seven days a week. With the expert input of the Tom’s team, a few tucks means a suit that fits better and lasts longer.

Mihalik was born a few months before the start of the Hungarian Revolution – a story, he says, that should not be forgotten.

“At times like these, with the whole world upside down, it’s important to remember. Canada doesn’t have to look for an identity. It has us – people from all over. We should be tolerant and walk side by side. Canada is a place we can all work together. At the end of the day, we’re brothers and sisters. That’s our calling card. I learned one thing: we need to remember who we really are. If you work hard and believe and surround yourself with good people, you can accomplish anything.”

“Our story is plain. My father left Hungary in ’56 with no money and no English. At that time, Kensington Market was very Jewish. With an influx of Hungarian Jews, we felt at home. Canada allowed us to live in peace, treated us as equals. We found homes. We found lives.”

“Tom’s Place remains a landmark in Kensington Market, with a mission to sell great quality menswear at great prices with unparalleled service – and that is cause for celebration.”
Call me by your – er, my – name

RUTH SHACH
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

About once a month, and more frequently during wedding season, mail arrives at my house addressed to someone who doesn’t live here – and I’m not talking about previous tenants, although William Stein sure subscribes to a lot of opera magazines. I’m referring to “Dr. and Mrs. Noam Grysman.”

This is perplexing to me, because while Dr. Noam Grysman is my husband of nearly six years, he’s married to Ruth Shach. You see, neither is my last name Grysman nor is my first name Noam. And if I were going to get really pedantic, I’m on my way to becoming a doctor as well (although it will be by the PhD route).

Some of the blame for this confusion is on me. I colloquially use my husband’s last name in social settings, like in synagogue, because it makes it simpler for people to refer to us as a family unit – i.e., “We’re having the Grysmans over for lunch on Shabbat.” So while “Dr. and Mrs. Noam Grysman” grinds my gears in a way I cannot describe without using harsh language, when I see “Dr. Noam and Mrs. Ruth Grysman,” it doesn’t rub against the grain in quite the same fashion.

Upon discussing the matter with my husband, he can relate to my frustration. While he is not a formal person – at work, he goes by his first name and is commonly known as Dr. G – he doesn’t like when mail is addressed to him as mister instead of doctor. Either use no title or use the correct one, he says.

I think that’s what it comes down to for women like me: when people use our husbands’ names in place of ours, they are not going by our “correct title.” Those of us who it bothers strongly see ourselves as a unit outside of our husbands, and want to be addressed as such.

Novelist Tabitha King recently wrote a sarcastic response to an Associated Press headline that read, “Stephen King and his wife donate $1.25M to New England Historic Genealogical Society” – despite the gift originally being her idea. In her retort, she questioned why she was referred to as “wife of” and not “Of Stephen,” “His Old Lady” or “His Ball-and-Chain.” Although the majority of women still take their husbands’ last names – a holdover from the ninth century doctrine of coverture – the number of women who choose to hyphenate, keep their maiden names or do something non-traditional, like come up with a new last name, is on the rise.

Being the scientist that I am, I asked around in a very non-scientific way (we call this anecdotal evidence) to get a sample of other women’s feelings on the issue. Their reasoning ranged from sentimental to practical. One doctor stated that her parents paid for and supported her through medical school, so she wanted to keep their last name for her practice. Some, like me, have publications under their maiden name, so they kept it for continuity. Another category of women, of course, loved taking their husband’s last name, feeling that it made them a family unit. There were some who even looked forward to shedding their original last names and particular family affiliations. And this list doesn’t even include those who smushed their last names together to make a totally new one to express their equality to their husband.

By no means am I saying everyone is bothered by this. But some of us are. So what should you do if you’re planning a simcha and you don’t know someone’s preferred manner of address? I’d say, as with most things, the best solution is communication. Just ask. We’re more than happy to tell you.

Mrs. Noam Grysman, a.k.a. Ruth Shach, is a clinical psychology doctoral student at Saint Louis University.
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The Venue
When choosing a venue, one must take the bride’s preferences, the desired tone of the party and the guest list into consideration. Bridal showers are commonly held at the host’s home or at a party room. Depending on the bride’s personality and interests, a venue that allows guests to partake in a specific activity may be preferable. The hosts should, ideally, know whether the bride is a tea party and pearls kind of person, or would prefer a group outing to a virtual reality arcade. It’s a personal choice, and there is no right or wrong answer.

The Décor
No matter where the shower is hosted, decorations have the power to transform any room and create a more festive atmosphere. When in doubt about choosing a theme for the décor, one may choose to incorporate the bride’s chosen wedding colour palette into any aspect of the decorations, from the flowers to the desserts.

The Menu
Bridal shower menus can be as simple as light bites and sweets, or as elaborate as themed platters including the bride’s favourite foods. If the shower is hosted in the mid-morning or early afternoon, it is best to present a buffet of light finger foods, such as petits fours, party sandwiches, fruit skewers and pastries. Hosts may consider serving mimosas and low-alcohol signature cocktails of the bride’s choice, or alcohol-free ‘mocktails,’ as well.

Activities
Many hosts decide to prepare games for the shower. This is a fun way for the party guests to get to know each other, have fun and entertain the bride simultaneously. Some brides may also choose to spend part of the shower opening gifts from the guests. If this occurs, it is best to assign one person to make a list of each gift and its giver, allowing for an easier process of writing thank-you notes after the party.

When all is planned and prepared, the most important thing to remember is to make the bride feel special on this day. The party is, after all, intended to ‘shower’ her with love, entertainment and encouragement leading up to her wedding. Remember this above all else and the event will be a success.
MEET THE INFLUENCERS OF TORONTO KOSHER CATERING

by Brenda Morrison

Introducing F+B Kosher: Fresh on the kosher catering scene + Backed by more than 40 years of catering experience in every outstanding bite. F+B Kosher represents a deliciously exciting new venture for Cary Silber and David Silber, who are now joined by Ryan Silber to launch a whole new era in full-service kosher catering.

Already dominating Toronto kosher catering, F+B Kosher is the exclusive caterer at Beth Tzedec, operating a COR-certified kitchen facility inside the synagogue. F+B Kosher is a preferred caterer at Adath Israel, Beth David and Beth Tikvah, as well as at many of the city’s premiere hotels and event venues.

With more than 40,000 catered events to his credit, Cary Silber believes, “You’re only as great as your last event.” Most recently, F+B Kosher catered a fabulous evening for the CJFAC Action Party with a VIP reception and 1,200 guests celebrating at Evergreen Brick Works.

Today’s discerning foodies, especially young millennials, are literally hungry for a change in kosher catering for everything from their own weddings to the casual parties, community functions, galas and bar/bat mitzvahs they attend.

“F+B Kosher is being recognized as the long overdue catalyst for changing people’s preconceived notions of kosher catering. With an appetite for creativity and innovation, our team approaches kosher food not for its limitations, but for its endless possibilities,” explains David Silber.

In order to offer the very best in contemporary kosher catering, F+B Kosher’s trailblazing Executive Chef Maxime Roy, formerly of the Windsor Arms Hotel, creates one-of-a-kind recipes inspired by global cuisine and the very latest food trends. For example, Chef Roy’s unique fusion of Japanese and Mexican – the Ahi Tuna Taco made with micro cilantro sprouts and wasabi kewpie – is simply stellar.

With a nod to some of the hottest food trends, other noteworthy hors d’oeuvres include Kung Pao Cauliflower, Mushroom Cigars, Kimchi Fries and Crispy Chicken Waffles. Planning a bar mitzvah? The Kosher Mac with an all-beef patty, lettuce and pickles on a sesame seed bun is an absolute party essential!

Also keeping up with social media trends, F+B Kosher creates kosher fare that looks as great as it tastes. For Ryan Silber, “Each and every passed hors d’oeuvre, food station and plated meal must be Instagram-worthy. Our perfect-picture fare is photographed by guests and posted online before they even take a bite!”

You only have one opportunity to get things right for your once-in-a-lifetime experience. For any occasion that requires impressive kosher, call Cary or David at 416-900-0918.