

Out with the Old,





Left: Some traditions, like tying cans to the back of the newlyweds' car, have easily traceable origins—but perhaps don't serve the same purpose they once did.

Above: Sometimes, the best way to go forward is to look to the past, which is why vintage cakes are becoming popular. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy MC Weddings

In with the New

HOW TO CREATE TRADITIONS THAT ARE AUTHENTIC & RESPECTFUL WHILE BEING MEMORABLE

By Amanda Nicklaus

When most people picture a wedding, they probably think of traditions that have been passed down over time: cutting a cake, tossing a bouquet, smashing a glass, jumping a broom, performing a specific dance. But in 2024, younger couples are taking a new approach to traditions, either updating them to fit their personal values and identity, or else tossing them out completely in favor of creating new rituals.

"2024 is going to continue to see couples planning weddings that fit their vision for their celebration, forgoing traditions, norms, and expectations that don't align with their priorities," Mara Mazdzer (WIPA, Fuse Weddings) predicted in *Special Events' 2023 Positive Predictions*. "Couples will continue to nix traditional elements like parent dances or dads walking daughters down the aisle if their family dynamics make that complicated. Cake cuttings, bouquet tosses, and garter tosses will also continue to dwindle in frequency as couples settle into planning an event that feels like an authentic reflection of them."

As more couples look to create new, personalized rituals, the onus falls on planners to forge meaningful and responsible practices. With the right mindset and a lot of innovation, new traditions can be an outlet to showcase your creativity as a planner and help your clients have a wedding that feels right for them in every way.

Turning back time

All traditions started out as an intentional gesture, even if the original significance has been lost over time. Some traditions, like tying cans to the back of the newlyweds' car, have easily traceable origins, while others, like breaking

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Mara Mazdzer, Owner and Creative Director of Fuse Weddings and Immediate Past President of WIPA



Couples are starting to gift bouquets instead of doing the traditional toss.

porcelain plates, are “often impossible to trace,” says history professor Joel F. Harrington in a recent article for the *New York Times*.

Whether or not the origins are traceable, wedding traditions found their place in ceremonies as visual and auditory demonstrations, the article says, quoting Claire Stewart, an author and associate professor of hospitality management. She says that these acts are “a disruption to indicate this is a special day and is to be remembered.”

As the function of marriage has changed, and as society and culture itself has shifted and been influenced by global connection and social media, many of these ancient rituals no longer resonate with couples, and in some cases, they are outdated enough to cause discomfort. “It's possible that couples are forgoing past wedding traditions because they do not feel connected to them in any way,” suggests Kimberly Sisti (SISTI & CO). “As years fly by, the intended reasoning behind certain traditions can be lost, thus inviting new traditions to crop up instead.”

Family dynamics, gender inclusivity and equality, heritage appreciation, and social media trends all play a role in determining whether longstanding traditions remain significant or in desperate need of an upgrade.

For example, bouquet tosses are being replaced by bouquet regifting to destigmatize singleness. Wedding parties are ditching gender separation while embracing gender neutral language, and couples are opting for wedding attire that lets them express their personalities more than traditional garb allows.

“We've always said that tradition is just peer pressure from dead people,” says wedding photographer Megan Breukelman (Megan & Kenneth). “While the core of a Western wedding ceremony has remained mostly the same over the years, the venues and scripts have adjusted for modern times. Many traditions we see now are evolutions from older ideas—like best men ensuring the bride's family couldn't re-capture a stolen bride from a ceremony. Nowadays, their focus is typically ensuring the rings stay on-site. Like any event, weddings are simply modernizing and adjusting traditions to fit the couple best.”

Even if traditions aren't necessarily problematic, culture has dictated the intense personalization of events.

"Couples are looking to put their own spin on traditions and refresh them," Heather Balliet (Amorology Weddings) told *The New York Times*. "They want to update and personalize them while holding onto remnants."

Ian Ramirez (Madeira Estates) echoes this sentiment. "As Gen Z has established itself as the dominating presence in the wedding scene in 2024, we are seeing [couples] throw out the pressures from their parents, grandparents, and previous generations to conform to the 'old ways' in favor of traditions that show off their personalities and increase their 'likes' amongst friends and followers."

Creating new traditions

The best place to start when crafting new rituals is with your couple's individual story: who they are as a person, what they value, where they live, their heritage, how they met, and what is important in their relationship. What traditions were passed down in their families? What symbolizes their love story? Getting a handle on what makes your couple unique is the first step in personalizing their wedding.

"To infuse elements with special meaning or significance to the couple, it is important to identify and integrate aspects that hold personal importance in their relationship. This may include incorporating shared memories, inside jokes, or personal symbols that evoke a sense of intimacy and nostalgia," says Sebastian



Above: Today's couples want to express themselves fully, which means finding wedding fashion that isn't the traditional tux and white gown. Some wedding outfitters provide nonbinary garb as well. Attire and photo courtesy Loulette Bride

Left: Vintage elements are often upgraded with a touch of modern. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy MC Weddings

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Centner (Eatertainment Events & Catering). “Additionally, a key consideration in the wedding planning process involves avoiding trends that might not resonate with the unique identity of the couple. By steering clear of popular fads and focusing on elements that authentically reflect the couple’s personality, the wedding can become a more genuine and memorable celebration of their love and connection.”

Special Events got in contact with Amorology Weddings and found they take a similar approach. “We typically ask our couples if there are things they want to hold onto that are meaningful to them and think of ways in which we can reinvent those time-honored traditions. In creating new ones, we love taking an organic part of the couple’s story to plan upon and create a new tradition that brings joy for many years to come.”

Heritage is becoming an especially strong marker in the couple’s personal story.

“In a world that is becoming increasingly diverse, many couples are choosing to celebrate their cultural heritage by incorporating it into their wedding theme,” says an article from [Traveler’s Q](#). (Turn to page 84 for a deep dive into a Gala Award-receiving Ukrainian heritage wedding.) “In 2024, we expect to see this trend evolve further with more fusion weddings, where couples blend elements from different cultures to create a unique and meaningful celebration. This could range from incorporating traditional attire or customs from both cultures to serving food from different cuisines. These weddings not only bring two families together but also showcase the beauty of diversity and inclusion.”

Meena Lee-DePasquale, the owner and designer at 5th Avenue Weddings & Events, talked to the [New York Times](#) about how she helps couples incorporate their cultures into modern celebrations. She’s planned weddings that combine Indian and Quaker heritage, as well as Jewish and Chinese celebrations. One wedding

Below: Saying goodbye to traditions means ditching outdated gender norms. Today’s wedding parties are made up of loved ones, no matter their gender. Photo courtesy Steve Steinhardt





The couple in this fusion wedding mixed traditional East Indian garb with wedding attire more often seen in the U.S. Photo courtesy Ayesha Hakki

combined Hawaiian Japanese and American Latin cultures. “We had custom sake cups made for each guest to do the traditional Hawaiian banzai toast and served musubi during cocktail hour, as well as had cherry blossom centerpieces,” she said in the article.

Traditions can take on new life when the original intent is placed in a personalized, modernized context that resonates with the couple but still holds true to its essential meaning. Ultimately, studying the background of a ritual is the best place to start, and communication between all parties is key to telling the right story.

“Understanding the significance of traditional elements involves a thoughtful exploration of which aspects can be modified or replaced to better align with the couple’s vision for their wedding day,” Centner continues. “Collaborative efforts between couples, wedding planners, and other stakeholders are essential in the process, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and the implementation of innovative concepts. Furthermore, a key aspect of this approach involves incorporating personal elements into the celebration, such as shared hobbies, interests, or meaningful experiences, to add a distinctly intimate and authentic touch to the wedding festivities.”



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Ian Ramirez, Venue Director of Madera Estates

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Above: Traditional venues aren't for everyone: unique ceremony spaces are part of the process in personalizing weddings. Shown here: The Little Daisy by Open Venues, a first-of-its-kind platform that helps users book rare and historic properties. Photo courtesy Open Venues



Above: On the rise: vintage cakes. As couples rethink traditions, certain styles of the past are timeless enough to make a comeback. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy Shannon Moffit

With great creativity comes great responsibility

Borrowing or updating cultural traditions does come with responsibility. It's important to avoid cultural appropriation, which "takes place when members of a majority group adopt cultural elements of a minority group in an exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical way," according to [Britannica](#). Put more simply, it is the "inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society" (Oxford Languages).

If there are certain traditions that your couple wants to embrace, whether passed down or adopted, it's important to understand as best you can the origin of that tradition and determine whether or not it accurately reflects the couple's identity.

Besides heritage, your couple's religious affiliations are important to consider. And for white couples, certain rituals may seem fun to adopt but often hold deeper meaning that doesn't fit into their own identity.

"As you're looking for new ritual elements, you start to consider ideas like jumping over the broom, getting ornate Mehndi, or smashing glass," reflects wedding writer [Najva Sol](#). "They seem like meaningful symbols, and great 'replacements,' mainly because they don't come with the religious burden of your own spiritual community. But the kicker is those are other people's religious and spiritual rituals.

"Chances are, you don't even understand the nuances of what those (often religious, always sacred) rituals represent. Jumping the broom is about slaves not having the legal right to marry. Smashing the glass represents the destruction of the second temple, and the responsibility to Tikkun Olam—repairing the world. Hula dancing is traditionally only done by men and accompanied by creation myths."

Sol encourages white couples to dig deeper into their heritage and identify where their traditions came from. “I keep hearing some version of ‘but I have no culture...’ when it comes to wedding planning, and I’m here to definitively say: you do. And it’s not even boring, I promise. As someone foreign to white culture, I know with complete certainty that you have a culture, because I live in it, and it’s not mine,” says Sol, who is Iranian American.

Other things to avoid

There are plenty of feathers to be ruffled when ditching timeless rituals and creating new ones. Here are a few things to navigate that might crop up as a result of pioneering new traditions:

Family drama

When tossing out timeless traditions, you can expect to cause a stir, especially within the couple’s immediate family.

“Disregarding the feelings of close family members without offering an explanation can lead to misunderstandings and strained relationships during the wedding planning process,” explains Centner. “It is essential to communicate openly about decisions and provide context to ensure that everyone feels heard and understood.”

As always, difficult yet open conversation is necessary in navigating conflict brought on by making significant wedding changes. “Engaging in open and respectful communication is crucial when explaining the reasons behind any changes made to traditional elements of a wedding,” continues Centner. “It involves transparently sharing the motivations and considerations that led to these modifications.”

He recommends helping upset family members to understand why the couple is making significant changes. “Emphasizing the significance of crafting a wedding that genuinely reflects the couple’s unique identity is essential in garnering understanding and support from family members. Additionally, finding compromises that strike a balance and meet the desires of both the couple and their families is a diplomatic approach to navigating potential conflicts and ensuring a harmonious wedding planning process.”

The folks at Amorology Weddings resort to compromise when necessary. “We occasionally find couples who don’t want a grand cake cutting but we have met in the middle with their parents and done a private cake cutting so that family gets the best of both worlds!”

Doing too much

Simple is better when crafting new traditions. “Overcomplicating rituals runs the risk of diluting the essence of what makes them special,” says Centner. “Simplifying and preserving the core elements of meaningful traditions can contribute to a more focused and emotionally resonant wedding ceremony, allowing the couple to cherish the significance of each ritual without unnecessary complexity.”

Destination damage

A feature for *Condé Nast Traveler* warns against mishandling local culture when planning a destination wedding. “Weaving into a celebration the markers of a culture, particularly when it’s one you don’t have personal ties to, can feel like both an exercise in ethics and a course in anthropology. How do you translate a place that you may not know that well to your guests? And where does the line



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Founder and Creative
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between what is respectful, tasteful, and even interesting, give way to the kitschy or appropriative?”

To start, understanding local traditions is key. Bringing your usual approach to a destination is less than tasteful, according to Fallon Carter (Fallon Carter Events). “When people try to take the place they’re from to the destination,” Carter says, “you miss out on all the atmosphere and magic a place has.”

Event pro Marcy Blum agrees. “You definitely don’t want to go into a place looking like, ‘Hello, we’re the Americans and we know how to do everything better than you, and we’re going to fly in our florist and designer,’” she says. “I don’t think it’s financially clever, or psychologically clever.”

Blum advises studying a destination’s local food and music or entertainment, and notes that “clothing and themed dress codes is not only a surefire way to teeter into cultural appropriation, but often are plain inaccurate portrayals of a place.

“There certainly are people who are on a yacht and they see Croatia and think, ‘Let’s have our wedding in Croatia, and then try to incorporate things like Croatian native dress for people at the reception,’” says Blum. “Which, as I try to explain to clients, nobody is walking around in those. It’s like going to Williamsburg and thinking the citizens are wearing pilgrim outfits. It’s not just appropriation, but absurd.”

Wedding designer Matthew Robbins (RobbinsOtoya) told *Condé Nast Traveler*, “It’s easy for couples to want to gravitate to a theme for a party in another country, because it’s just easy to attach to, but you don’t want it to feel overproduced or contrived. If you don’t have a heritage connection, it can even be a bit uncomfortable for your guests who are like: ‘Why are my friends suddenly doing this thing that has zero connection to them?’”

Below: A vibrant wedding welcome party for a destination wedding in Capri, Italy by Marcy Blum Associates. Photo courtesy Allan Zepeda





Left: Table-length cakes are gaining popularity as couples look for new ways to display food and beverage. Photo courtesy Bliss Katherine via *The New York Times*

Above: Some couples are forgoing guest books in favor of voice recording boxes—letting them hear sweet messages from their guests that will last a lifetime. Wedding by Amorology Weddings. Photo courtesy This Modern Romance

New trends

2024 is starting off with some extra creative trends.

Here are just some of the trends being reported at the onset of 2024:

- Moving away from wedding parties
- Walking solo/as a couple down the aisle
- Hybrid weddings to include those not able to attend
- Unique and unconventional venues
- Integration of technology
- Elevated guest portraits
- Gifting the bouquet
- Digital voice recordings in place of guest books
- Desserts hanging from the ceiling
- Ditching the sweetheart's table and sitting the couple with family
- Vintage-style cakes
- [Table-length sheet cakes](#)

Above information courtesy OFD Consulting and The New York Times

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“Instead of recreating a ritual you aren't connected to, consider having someone local officiate the wedding,” Carter says, “and briefly explain to guests the elements of local rituals and customs, or beliefs about marriage that they hold—it'll be more interesting, and informative, anyway.”

New trends for 2024

2024 is rife with new wedding trends that will undoubtedly become swaps for many longstanding traditions. Before rushing to promote new trends, however, make sure what's popular is also meaningful to your couples.

“Making changes solely for the sake of trends, without considering their personal significance to the couple, may result in a wedding that lacks authenticity,” says Centner. “It is crucial to prioritize elements that hold meaning for the couple rather than succumbing to fleeting trends, ensuring a more genuine and lasting celebration of their union.”



“Clothing and themed dress codes is not only a surefire way to teeter into cultural appropriation, but often are plain inaccurate portrayals of a place.”

Marcy Blum, owner of [Marcy Blum Associates](#)





That being said, many rising wedding trends are excellent things to incorporate into weddings this year, and can be presented as optional swaps to any couple.

Sarah Chianese (Mangia and Enjoy!) notes that social media will play a huge role in dictating these trends. “With social media influencing the last of the millennials and the entirely new generation, Gen Z, these couples seek ‘wow’ factors, immersive experiences for their guests, themes, and a celebration exhibiting their style and shared interests. Most of them have been exposed to social media outlets exhibiting hundreds of weddings posted [to accounts] over the last decade; it’s no longer a scenario where a couple has only witnessed weddings they’ve attended or seen on TV, in movies, or in wedding magazines. They have been inundated with visuals and ideas, even if it’s not a keyword they search for. As a result of this mass wedding stimulation, there is a goal to create their own story, provide a unique experience for their guests, and step out of tradition.”

Here’s your permission to get creative this year. Really get to know your couples and their story, and don’t be afraid to update, personalize, or completely toss out traditions that normally may seem essential to planning a wedding. With the right research, plenty of communication, and the courage to lean into self-expression, you can revitalize your planning approach and steer clear of stale rituals, bringing deep significance and satisfaction to your couples on their magical day. ●

Opposite page, top: One fun tradition we’ve been seeing more of, one or both of the wedding party chopping their locks once the ceremony ends. Photo courtesy A. Faith Arts via *The New York Times*

Opposite page, bottom: In 2021, bride Brittany Smith Gallant made headlines when a bridesmaid appeared as a hologram at her wedding. Now, only three years later, innovative tech is becoming a normal integration in weddings. Photo courtesy APNews

This page, top: Elegant, sophisticated guest portraits are replacing the cheeky, playful photo ops of previous years. Photo courtesy Portraits on White