

special feature

city scoop

From bakeries in Ravenswood to nail salons in Wicker Park, **Lisbeth Levine** scouts out bridal spots you can use.



Salon or nightclub

With its exotic Indonesian decor, a DJ and complimentary wine or champagne with any service, **Sole Nail Lounge & Beauty Emporium** in Wicker Park (773-486-7653) has become the city's hottest spot for nails. The 2,000-square-foot nail salon is doing a booming business in private soirées, including showers and bachelorette parties. You can request a DJ who specializes in hip-hop, '80s dance tunes or country music, and even bring in your own food and bartender. One client hired a tarot card reader and set up a belly dancing class. Besides nails, the salon is known for resident brow expert Rashida B. who can also do makeup consultations for the bridal party and airbrush foundation for weddings. The non-girly decor makes it a comfortable spot for coed washes, too. In fact, Sole has already been the scene of two proposals, says owner Trina Hatchett. Grooms who want to hear a yes (instead of hold on a minute") wait for their beloved to finish her manicure before they whip out the ring.

Made to order

Couples are taking their pre- and post-wedding festivities into the kitchen with interactive cooking parties at **Bespoke Cuisine** (bespokecuisine.com) in the West Loop. Bespoke began hosting cooking parties last year and quickly found they made great rehearsal dinners, showers and post-wedding brunches. Guests are split into groups to prepare a meal in the sleek commercial-grade kitchen with a classically trained chef, then move to the front of the inviting loftlike space to sit down and enjoy it. The menu is customized for each party, but could reflect a couple's ethnic backgrounds, first-date meal or favorite family recipes. Everyone goes home with printed copies of the recipes and a compact stainless-steel spice box. Cooking parties can be effective ice-breakers for weddings where most of the guests don't know each other. Co-owner Kim Shambrook (pictured) has noticed that something about the act of chopping onions together "breaks down barriers."



Retro cocktails

Imagine a hotel bar, only without the hotel. Add a dash of retro camp, an extensive selection of classic cocktails and a menu based on room-service favorites (such as the mini grilled cheese, made with artisanal cheese and served with tomato soup). The result is **Motel** (themotelbar.com), which recently opened in the former Montgomery Ward headquarters along the Chicago River. Co-owners Hubie Greenwald and John Manion, who also own Mas, vow to treat old-school cocktails like the Rob Roy and Singapore sling with the respect they deserve, shaking what's meant to be shaken and stirring what's meant to be stirred. A pool table provides diversion and a jukebox offers indie and classic rock 'n' roll and jazz of the Charlie Parker and John Coltrane variety. The relaxed decor features tufted banquettes, lounge chairs and oversized booths in shades of orange, green and brown. Could be just the spot for a casual rehearsal dinner or bachelorette party.



Baker's choice

Known for topsy-turvy cakes, fondant balls and appliqués, Stephanie Samuels has earned many a rave (including a Best of Chicago designation in *Chicago* mag) for the custom cakes she's created over the last 12 years. Samuels has become a lot easier to find since opening her first retail space last fall, the cheery **Angel Food Bakery** (angelfoodltd.com). Couples can consult (and taste) while admiring the vintage Easy-Bake oven collection of the Ravenswood bakery. Her love of retro is also reflected in desserts that owe their main inspiration to Hostess, like deluxe renditions of Twinkies and Sno Balls. Imagine the buzz these could cause at your sweets table. →