



# Wedding Cakes: BOLD or Traditional?

WRITER | KIM HYTINEN PHOTOS | SWEET HEATHER ANNE AND THE RED MIXER

Weddings. From the styled attire of the loving couple to the carefully picked florals, the sweet melodies to the delicious catered meals, and everything in between, these joyous events display plenty of beauty for the senses to feast upon, with one of the most celebrated highlights being the tailored confection known as the wedding cake.

Most couples arrive at their chosen bakery with a composite of ideas for their cake – pages torn from magazines and links to various wedding websites scribbled into a planner or saved into a phone app. Their designer's first goal is to assist them in tapering the various ideas into a beautifully unique design all their own.

"We help people think about their wedding as a whole – the colors, the dress, the venue – and we pull ideas from that," said Heather Anne Leavitt, owner of Sweet Heather Anne in Ann Arbor. "Then, we focus on textures and patterns. We break people out of that standard box and customize a design at the first meeting. You can see if they love the design by the look in their eyes."

Leavitt, who studied art and design at the University of Michigan, brings to the table an exquisite balance of art education, worldly culinary experience, and a love for locally sourced, fresh ingredients. After college, her interests led her to Italy, where she developed a passion for good food intermingled with art. Before opening her business, Leavitt's talents were put to the test

when she served as assistant to Courtney Clark of Cake Nouveau on the Food Network's show *Cake Challenges*. Back home in Michigan, her greatest challenge is perfecting the scheduling aspect of the May through November wedding season.

Leavitt's schedule is hectic, and she leads a full crew that consists of a fellow designer, baker, business manager, kitchen assistants, dishwashers, and interns. "The artist part came easy to me, but I had to learn how to run a business. I had to figure out how to manage people. I have a great team. We share a passion, and that makes our work really fun," she said.

It's typical for commercial cake designers such as Sweet Heather Anne to require six to eight months lead time before an event, especially if the date falls within the busiest time of year for their services. Off-season often has quicker turnaround times, sometimes even as short as a couple of weeks.

If a cake is needed during the wedding season and a short turnaround is requested, finding a designer working under Cottage Law can be a lifesaver. Cottage Law enables home cooks offering specific food items to prepare and sell items made in their home kitchens.

Baking and creating goods from a kitchen in Howell, Alecia Hurlbert has become one of Livingston County's go-to bakers for cakes and confections. Cottage Law allows Hurlbert to oper-

ate The Red Mixer without the overhead of a commercial lease, thus lowering operating costs and keeping prices affordable to her growing customer base. She requires a contract commitment of only three or four weeks before an event, but can occasionally accept orders with even tighter deadlines.

Hurlbert is self-taught in the craft of baking and confectionary design. The name of her business stems from a red Kitchenaid mixer she received as a gift – one which has been fundamental to her continued success in the community. Among locals, she is known for delicious, fun designs – especially birthday cakes, which keep her busy year-round, and school fundraiser treats. Even so, she is ready for wedding season each year and stays up to date on the latest trends.

"I find that most brides want traditional-style cakes with buttercream frosting and maybe some elements of fondant. And I can certainly give them that," Hurlbert said. Vanilla and marble layers with fruit filling are pretty popular, but she encourages creativity with the flavor or filling of the top layer of the cake – the one that is for the bride and groom. "It's okay to have some fun with it!"

When everything needs to be perfect, right down to the last smidge of buttercream frosting, choosing professionals who fit your style and budget can make wedding planning a piece of cake. ☐

## SOME TRENDS FOR FALL WEDDINGS

Sweet Heather Anne provided this short list:

- Blood Orange Olive Oil Cake made with almond flour (inspired by her time in Florence)
- Jam made from plums as filling
- Salted caramel incorporated into the cake

At the Red Mixer, Hurlbert suggested these:

- Traditional flavors like vanilla, chocolate, and marble
- Clean, straight lines in the design
- Geometric shapes with piping and soft florals

# Decadent CAKES

## NORTHERN MI

**Bella e Dolce**  
748 S Main Street  
Cheboygan, MI 49721  
(231) 420-3077  
BellaEDolceNorth.com

## Northern Delights

4417 Trillium Ridge  
Central Lake, MI 49622  
(231) 599-3400  
Northern-Delights.com

## Ruthann's Gourmet Bakery

105 N Bridge Street, Suite B  
Bellaire, MI 49615  
(231) 350-7610  
RuthannsGourmetBakery.com

## GRAND TRAVERSE

**Aunt B's Cake & Desserts**  
20931 Maple Street  
Lake Ann, MI 49650  
(231) 642-1205

## Celebration Cake Design

2819 Cass Road  
Traverse City, MI 49684  
(231) 534-4740

## Sweet Tartlette

445 E Front Street  
Traverse City, MI 49684  
(231) 642-5333  
SweetTartlette.com

## Top Tier Cakery

903 Valley View Drive  
Traverse City, MI 49685  
(231) 499-0133  
TopTierCakery.com

## MID MI

**Coco Renee**  
112 E Michigan Avenue  
Big Rapids, MI 49307  
(231) 287-0100  
CocoReneeWeddings.com

## The Pie Hole

104 S Michigan Avenue  
Big Rapids, MI 49307  
(231) 912-0445

## SOUTHEAST MI

**Gwen's Cake Decorating & Etc.**  
5714 Blue Grass Lane  
Saline, MI 48176  
(734) 429-2039  
GwensCakeDecorating.com

## Zingerman's Bakehouse

3711 Plaza Drive  
Ann Arbor, MI 48108  
(734) 761-2095  
ZingermansBakehouse.com

## SOUTHWEST MI

**Bert's Bakery**  
309 River Street  
Kalamazoo, MI 49048  
(269) 349-2091

4419 South Westnedge  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007  
(269) 492-9111  
BertsBakery.com

## WEST MI

**Grand Finale Desserts and Pastries**  
225 Franklin Avenue  
Grand Haven, MI 49417  
(616) 414-9555  
GrandFinaleDesserts.com

## UPPER PENINSULA

**Huron Mountain Bakery**  
1301 S Front Street  
Marquette, MI 49855  
(906) 255-1301  
HuronMountainBakery.com

## OTHER SERVICES

**The Bride's Bridal Show**  
(734) 320-8019  
TheBrideBridalShow.com  
Free admission  
Sept 29 and Nov 3, 2019