

Lifting the Veil on Las Vegas' 'New Wave' Weddings

America's capital of quickie weddings has witnessed a stylish revival, driven by social media, vintage aesthetics and a post-pandemic craving for razzle-dazzle

For almost a century, "Fabulous Las Vegas" has been a hotspot for nuptials, thanks to its easy-going marriage license rules, prime location and a dizzying array of ceremonies, from drive-through elopements to all-out spectacles, complete with showgirls, sequins and (why not?) the occasional adorned elephant. Yet, in recent years, it seemed the altar lights had dimmed in the Entertainment Capital of the World's subsidiary, "Wedding Capital of the World." Fewer couples were rolling the dice on Vegas vows, hinting that the honeymoon period might finally be over.

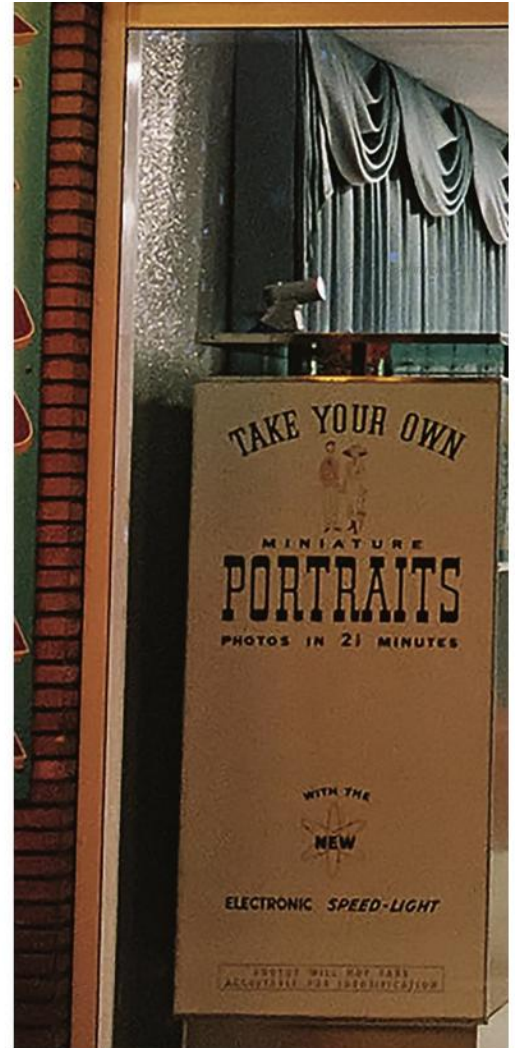
But post-pandemic, Vegas is back in its bridal best. And she's never looked better. In 2024, Clark County issued a buoyant 76,779 marriage licenses, with wedding tourism generating an estimated \$2.5 billion in economic impact. Among the 18,000 people employed in the city's matrimony industry are a new wave of style-savvy vendors, who are reshuffling the pack by blending retro style with modern sensibilities.

Think pin-up parlors using vegan beauty products, vintage-inspired cakes worthy of a social post on the grid and ceremonies so kitsch they're actually chic — with Elvis still very much in the building. In short, it's once again fashionable to say "I do" in Sin City.

Love Me Tender

Leading the charge in Vegas' love-fueled renaissance are two fingers-on-the-pulse chapels: Sure Thing and its equally glamorous younger sister, Sure Thing Too. Tucked into a former strip mall on Fremont Street — sandwiched on either side of a tattoo parlor and bathed in the warm glow of vintage motel signs — the love shacks have been lighting up social media like a Vegas slot machine on a winning streak.

Step through the doors and it's easy to see why. The interiors are a glorious whirlwind of nostalgic powder pink and baby blue drapes, flickering sweetheart-shaped neon and cherubs suspended overhead. This is Vegas kitsch, made fresh for a new generation.



The Instagenic settings have chimed particularly well online, says co-owner Amy Hybarger, who along with her partner Victoria Hogan, has a background in photography. "I'd say at least half of our bookings find us on social media," Hybarger says.

And it's not just the aesthetics that are luring lovebirds. According to Hybarger, affordability is another major draw. "Although many of our



Photos by Amy Lee

couples really splurge on details for their day, it's also easy to be super chic in Vegas and not break the bank," she adds.

The chapels lay on themed experiences with all the showmanship of a circus ringmaster twirling a gilded baton. At Sure Thing and Sure Thing Too, lovers can strike a pose in the creaking leather seats of a classic car, march down the aisle to the dulcet tones of an antique Wuritzer electronic organ and exchange vows beneath the glittering gaze of a female Elvis or a burlesque showgirl.

Bonus points, of course, if their pampered pooch is trotting down the aisle as a ring bearer in a rhinestone collar. And there's even a velvet-curtained photo booth on hand for a strip of kiss-me-quick souvenirs.

One couple who decided to renew their vows at the Sure Thing chapel are Margaret and Corey Blenart. The amorous duo is the creative force behind A Pretty Cool Hotel Tour, a viral account showcasing throwback hotels in the U.S. that

has amassed a staggering 1.4 million followers on TikTok.

Renewing their vows 13 years after marrying young out of a sense of "duty or even obligation" to their deeply religious backgrounds, Margaret said Vegas offered a moment of true reverence. "We're still very much in love, but we're different people now and don't hold the same beliefs about marriage."

Now in their thirties, their union these days feels more like a grand adventure. "Vegas is the perfect place to celebrate that. It's very 'come as you are,' no questions asked. And we're serious about being a little bit ridiculous, dramatic and hopelessly romantic," she said, recalling their happily-ever-after moment, complete with a photo op in front of a black velvet portrait of "The King of Rock and Roll" himself.

Let Them Eat Cake

There's really nothing new about over-the-top wedding cakes in Vegas — sugar-sprinkled





Photos by Amy Lee

fantasies have been served here for decades. Back in 1967, Elvis Presley and Priscilla Beaulieu sliced into a towering six-tier creation, draped in a cloak of Kirsch-flavored fondant, at their Aladdin Hotel celebration, following a speedy ceremony that took all of eight minutes.

Today, one can only imagine The King tipping his lacquered quiff in approval at Winston Marie Cakes, a mid-century-themed bakery where the confections flirt shamelessly with glitter-dipped cherries, coquettish satin bows and endless swirls of decadent buttercream.

"Interest in vintage wedding cakes has definitely picked up over the past year," said owner Monique Perez. "Right now, I'm averaging about 40 wedding cakes a month, ranging from a small 'elopement' cake to a tiered showstopper." At the more elaborate end of the scale, a bespoke cake can take up to 24 hours to create. "My signature look is very maximalist and detail-heavy," she said, adding that cherubs, pearl sprinkles and vintage toppers all make frequent appearances.

Vows and Victory Curls

A quick detour across town leads to Dafna Beauty parlor, a hair-and-makeup emporium for vintage vixens. Since opening its doors in 2023, the boutique has been conjuring up bridal looks that would have made Elizabeth Taylor raise an impeccably arched brow in approval.

Inside the all-pink-everything salon is a dream team of stylists, armed with flicks of cat-eye liner, tubes of siren-red lipstick and enough hairspray to sculpt a beehive that could survive a thunderstorm.

"Old Hollywood wavy hair is always a go-to, but I feel like we've been doing more 1960s laid back half updos lately too," said salon founder and beauty influencer Dafna Bar-el. Baby blue eyeshadow is also having a moment, particularly among those committing at Sure Thing Too, where the look doubles as a playful nod to the chapel's pastel-hued palette.

Bar-el is quick to note that her beauty parlor celebrates vintage aesthetics, not values.



Photo courtesy of Winston Marie Cakes



Photo courtesy of Dafna Beauty

All products are vegan, cruelty-free and consciously low on plastic packaging.

She adds that being situated in the heart of Downtown, in the shadow of events like "Viva Las Vegas" – the world's largest rockabilly festival, held each April – helps spread the word. "We personally attend the event and also host an annual pre-Viva party at our boutique."

Love through the Lens

Capturing these looks in all their Technicolor glory is a new crew of shutterbugs and

videographers. Among them is photographer **Cruz Valentin**, who swaps digital crispness for deliciously grainy 35mm analog film. She's often spotted at offbeat venues like the Neon Museum Las Vegas, where couples can tie the knot before a glowing chorus of historic signage and have enough room for up to 50 guests.

For those craving yet more throwback magic, Valentin also offers instant Polaroids and captures the ceremony on original Kodak Super 8 film – not since your grandparents' road trip to Niagara Falls have these old-school cameras seen so much action.

Getting hitched in Sin City has always been a vibe; it's just that now, a new generation is falling head over heels for its unique charms, often via the scroll of a social media feed, said Hybarger. "Vegas weddings have always been cool! I think the couples getting married now care less about traditional norms and are really leaning into having enjoyable, beautiful experiences."

As newlyweds increasingly trade protocol for personality, Vegas just might be the bellwether for how Americans marry now: in wildly photogenic settings and proudly on their own terms. |

- Zoey Goto



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