

# *This isn't your Bubbe's bat mitzvah*

BESA's Lydia Krasner knows her stuff  
when it comes to planning simchas

BY JESSICA HANEWINCKEL

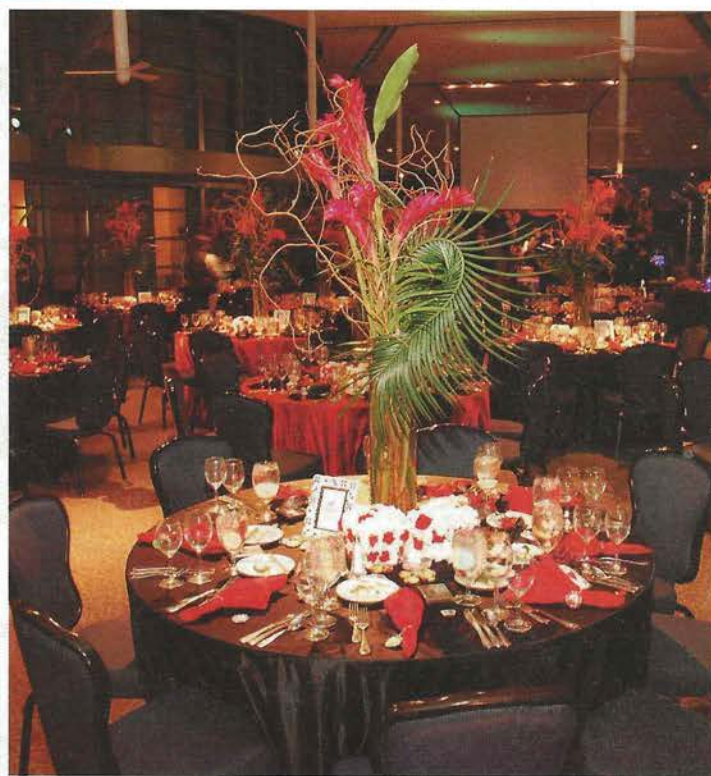
If there's one thing Lydia Krasner prides herself on, it's making sure each simcha she plans is unique, memorable and a true representation of the guest(s) of honor. And Krasner, an event consultant for BESA (Bar/Bat Mitzvah Event Services Association) and co-owner of Charming Expressions (a party entertainment vendor), knows what she's doing. In her 14 years in the industry, and the 500 to 600 parties she's planned, she's seen it all, done it all and certainly coordinated it all. (In 2008, she planned 46 parties; 38 were bar or bat mitzvahs, and the remaining eight were weddings or corporate events.)

"Bar mitzvahs used to be tuna and bagels at the synagogue," Krasner says. "You see these old pictures, and there's a piano player — she's a woman with a big hairdo — and the girls are all in long dresses with a tie in the back, and the boys are toasting with punch. It's so different now."

Today's kids, she says, are more sophisticated in their taste, and more influenced by what they see on TV.

"What you see now are these kids who are just exploding with fancier dresses. It's so highly influenced by the media, because of 'My Super Sweet 16' where these people are spending \$300,000 on a kid's Sweet 16, and the kid gets not one car, but two, and the poodle gets painted pink to match the party."

Krasner says she does take into consideration what the bar mitzvah boy or the bat mitzvah girl wants at his or her party. She always meets with clients' children to find out about their family, what their interests are, what their heritage is, etc., to coordinate perfectly personalized parties they love with a theme uniquely their own. After all, she says, the party is about them.



But she also works with parents to satisfy their desire to make the party as meaningful and memorable for family as it is fun for the kids.

"You have to come back to the meaning of it," she says. "Why do you have a bar mitzvah? It's a coming of age. It's acceptance of the responsibility of Jewish adulthood. There's so much involved. I just feel like my goal is to help them define that."

Krasner explains that meaning can remain very strong at a bar or bat mitzvah while still keeping it trendy and fresh so kids — especially those who can go to upwards of 75 parties in a season — never get bored.

Instead of the usual lengthy candle lighting at the party, Krasner says, many people are opting to forego it, or they're finding more and more creative ways to substitute another dedication ceremony: a puzzle dedication, a wine ceremony or a Havdalah ceremony.

Themes are also getting more and more unique.

"The club theme is big," Krasner says. "Kids like to feel grown up. That's why when you have a party at a club downtown, or at a hotel setting using the different height furniture and giving them different groupings, it makes them feel more grown up."

Related to the club theme, Krasner explains, is lounge furniture. As simple as it seems, lounge furniture is a great seating option and can create a sophisticated mood.

"What I love about the lounge furniture is you can use it to surround the dance floor, and it keeps the kids engaged, because that's where they're going to sit," Krasner says. "They feel like they're at a club."

Other ways kids like to feel more adult? The food they're served.

"A big trend right now is coffee bars and sushi bars," Krasner says. "Kids are really into those. They've gotten more sophisticated. They want the filet and real food instead of pasta and pizza. I've done a yakisoba barbecue, and the action stations are really popular."

Another favorite addition to many of Krasner's parties is tying food into the party's theme. Is your venue Petco Park? Choose sports-themed foods like cotton candy and hot dogs. Going retro with a '50s theme? Serve sliders. Kids especially like food they can pick up and take with them, because, Krasner says, they spend less time eating and more time enjoying all the entertainment. What does that mean for the ice cream sundae bar and the chocolate fountain? They're becoming passé, she says, because the ice cream sundae turns to mud before kids can eat it, and everyone's seen and done the fountain. Ditto with a



traditional cake. What's replacing them?

"Cupcake displays," says Krasner, who claims them as one of her favorite things. "Cupcakes are hot. You see all these cupcake stores popping up everywhere."

Another unusual food addition to make a bar or bat mitzvah unique is a kettle corn booth. Anyone can hire one to come on site and cook fresh, hot caramel corn for guests, offered in containers appropriately printed with, "Thanks for popping into my bar mitzvah!"

So what are adults supposed to do during all the munching of sushi, kettle corn and sliders? Lots of families are now opting to make the luncheon that day for adults and the event later that night for kids. However, Krasner says she prefers to see both kids and adults enjoying the atmosphere of the nighttime soirée.

"My goal is for everybody to have a good time, and the parents like watching the kids," Krasner says.

And if you're all out of ideas about how to make your kid's party the highlight of the season, you could always have your kid make his grand entrance on a zip line, as one of Krasner's clients did. Later in the party, it serves as entertainment for the other kids, who each get a chance to try it. Now if that's not memorable, we don't know what is. To learn more about the possibilities for a bar or bat mitzvah coming up in your life, visit [www.mitzvaevent.com](http://www.mitzvaevent.com) or call Krasner at (619) 548-3485. ♡

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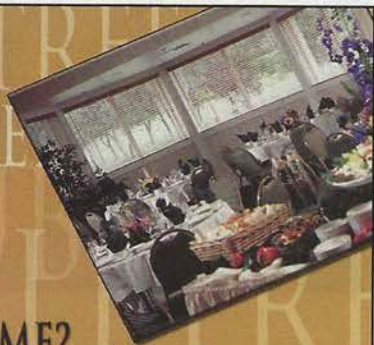
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- Installation and execution are important. You can make the cute place cards, but if you don't put them out in a really neat way, they're missing that extra oomph.
- Lighting can transform a room. It helps direct energy and the eye in ways that give an otherwise dull room a personality.
- Design a logo for your child and place it all over the party to create consistency — onto napkins, mints, cookies, desserts, gobos (reflection of a design in light on a wall or other surface).
- Find things you'll need in bulk at wholesalers and visit special event conventions for new ideas. Observe other parties you or your child have been to. Ask your child what she liked, what she saw, what she ate and what made the party great. That way you'll get inspiration for new ideas for your own kid's party, and you'll also know what not to do to avoid repetition. Asking your child's friends' parents is another way to find out.
- Pick an unusual theme and an unusual venue. Sometimes the most expensive parties aren't the best. The mix of people and the venue make a big difference.
- Don't forget to decorate bathrooms. Everyone goes there.
- The deejay is the party's pulse and the best way to entertain the multigenerational crowd.
- Entertainment can double as a favor if it's something the kids can make themselves, personalize and take home.
- Always have entertainment during the cocktail hour. Kids get bored just noshing. Give them something to do, and it'll keep them occupied so they're not occupying you.
- Start planning six months out. Lots of people are choosing to wait right now because of the economy, but it'll just delay the inevitable and add to your stress.

- Look everywhere for ideas. Krasner has bought her best items at such places as Home Depot, the M&Ms Web site, and even a science Web site, where she found fake snow that looks and feels real but won't melt. (She used that for a ski-themed party.)
- If you select a December date, remember that many hotels decorate for Christmas and won't remove their décor for your event. Be prepared to deal with that or choose a venue where Christmas décor is a non-issue.
- Hire a party planner to assist you either through the whole process or just during the day of the party. They'll refer you to quality vendors they know and trust and who've planned bar and bat mitzvahs before. The day of the party, they'll make sure the flow goes well, you've chosen the right entertainment and all problems during the party are taken care of discreetly while Mom and Dad are in their seats enjoying themselves and their family. They'll also provide "kid control" — one pair of eyes per 20 kids.
- Trust your vendors and know their credentials. Ask them how many bar and bat mitzvahs they've done. For many vendors, like photographers and caterers, it makes a difference. Also ask if they've worked with your other vendors in the past. Fix any problems before they have a chance to start.
- Use professionals, even for things like balloons. You can't just order from Party City — you don't have enough time the day of the party to make 20 trips from the store to your venue delivering balloons.
- Make sure your venue has done bar and bat mitzvahs before. If they're not prepared to deal with the mess the kids will most certainly make, you could be charged extra for the clean-up.
- Ask about the power allowance in the room where the party will be. If it's not wired to handle lighting, a coffee bar, a deejay and a chocolate fountain, you'll be blowing fuses left and right. If there aren't enough amps, you'll need a power drop. ☆

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