



Eye for Design

The experts talk trends, inspiration and how to make an event shine on a budget.

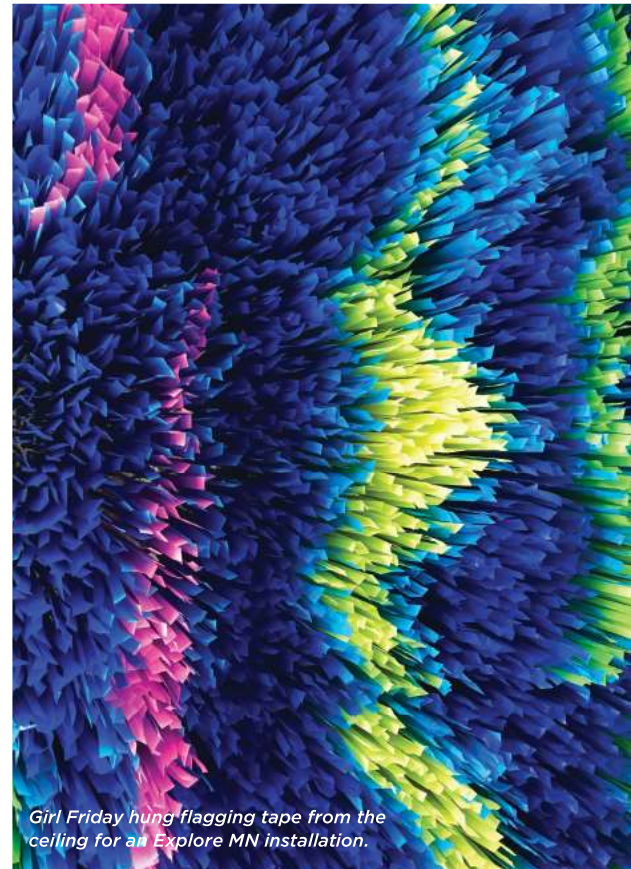
BY MEGAN GOSCH, MORGAN HALASKA & KASSIDY TARALA

Children's Minnesota Star Gala 2018 by BeEvents

PHOTOS: LAUREN B. PHOTOGRAPHY; (OPPOSITE) BRUCE SILCOX PHOTOGRAPHY; GIRL FRIDAY



Bungalow 6 Design and Events' epic 50th birthday bash design



Girl Friday hung flagging tape from the ceiling for an Explore MN installation.

MAKING MAGIC WITH MUNDANE MATERIALS

We've recently had a few clients that let us play with different photo backdrops, which gave us a fantastic opportunity to introduce new materials into our work. [Recently] we've used pegboards, golf pencils, sprinkles, folded paper, flagging tape, inflatables, fiber fill and more! Since we use every material in a different way, there's a lot of research that goes into our installations ahead of time to answer those odd questions— which glue will adhere best to this? How heavy will the installation be when we hang 1,000 of these? What's the longevity of this in a high-traffic area?

—Emma Geary, client manager, Girl Friday

In the next couple months, we'll be using foam, pool noodles, pingpong balls, crepe paper and recycled computer keyboard keys.

—Carly Van Veldhuizen, owner, Girl Friday

Let There Be Light

If you're trying to make an impact on a budget, lighting design can completely change a room. Finding that balance on your lighting budget can be a careful conversation with your client but it can be so worth the spend.

—Hana April Chughtai, founder, Hana April Inc.

When you're determining décor priorities you need to consider your audience. Who's going to notice or appreciate what you've put into the décor? In my opinion, lighting is still the most transformative décor element and is in every proposal I write.

—Todd Pinzuti, owner, Bungalow 6 Design and Events

Lighting's become more accessible and affordable with LED and better operated light fixtures that don't require a lot of labor. I push lighting over any other type of décor as its the most transformative. Potentially 30-35 percent of your décor budget is spent on lighting.

—Todd Pinzuti, owner, Bungalow 6 Design and Events



TIP: Keep a few bags of Leonetti Confetti on hand. For last-minute events, Leonetti says they can easily be added to a table to pull together the décor. For winter, Leonetti suggests white confetti, which can be sprinkled on Christmas trees.

Confetti in the Air

A BIG TREND in event décor right now is confetti. What's even trendier? Confetti that gives back.

In August 2018, Kylee Leonetti founded Leonetti Confetti, a confetti company that employs women from Wayside Recovery Center, a mental health care facility for women with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health problems.

Finding steady, flexible employment while in recovery is nearly impossible, so Leonetti wanted to provide an opportunity that could serve as a bridge for women in recovery preparing to reenter the workforce.

"We have five women working with us right now. The nature of the job makes it easy to stay with it if they want to, but they can also leave whenever they're

'ready,'" Leonetti says. "We provide everything they need in a kit, so all they have to do is cut the confetti."

Leonetti Confetti only employs women from Wayside, which is where they have all their meetings. However, Leonetti says during the winter, she drives to different sober houses to make it easier for the women.

Though confetti might not be the cheapest option for an event, Leonetti says the mission of her company often offsets the cost for planners.

"We've been noticing a trend where people are really only interested in adding value to their events in ways that give back. What really leaves a lasting impression is doing something that makes a difference," she says.

In addition to giving back to women in

recovery, Leonetti Confetti sells biodegradable confetti made of recycled paper. "It's not super cheap, but it's sustainable and it gives back," Leonetti says. "One-hundred percent of the money—and then some—goes to the women."

For autumn events, Leonetti says confetti can be a great option to spruce up tables. "When flowers are kind of hard to find in the fall, sometimes it's just easier to have some confetti. In a pinch, it can really add to a table," she says.

Get Connected

LEONETTI CONFETTI
leonetticonfetti.com | 763.439.4222

PHOTO: LEONETTI CONFETTI

LET'S TALK ABOUT Budgets

When I first started in the industry as a corporate event planner, budgets were hefty and guest experiences were top-notch until they weren't once the market crashed. Thankfully it seems as though now organizations are investing budget dollars back into events to boost customer and employee morale.

JEN HANSEN
EVENT SPECIALIST
EVENT LAB

The majority of your budget should be going towards guest experiences that are tangible and can leave a lasting impression and it's best to try new trends on a budget by focusing on one specific aspect. Focus on patterned votive candles or a few strategically placed linens instead of an entire room of bold design. In our personal design approach, we make sure to include stylish linens, innovative centerpiece designs, detailed signage, and you can never go wrong with innovative food and drink options that elevate the guest experience, late-night snacks and little favors that guests can take away.

HANA APRIL CHUGHTAI
FOUNDER, HANA APRIL INC.

Choose wisely

On a budget, it's best to stay away from overly trendy ideas. Classic is always the best route when budget is a concern. Try to remember what it will look like in photos 10 years from now. Choose wisely. Food, beverage and venue are what people remember so start there and build up. If you really want something trendy, pick one element and do it well.

I usually like to push for one great moment instead of a bunch of half-baked ideas. If social media-worthy moments are what the client is after, I say spend 20 percent of your budget. Typically I shoot for anything interactive that can be captured. Photo spaces, sexy lounge environments, interactive areas where guests have to participate in an activity. That could include 3D goggles, silent discos, or games with prizes. Anything that keeps the guests engaged is what I'll fight to keep.

TODD PINZUTI
OWNER
BUNGALOW 6 DESIGN
AND EVENTS

When it comes to budgets you want to know your big three—the three most important moments that matter to the success of your event. Invest your dollars in those to be the best they can be. We seek deeply to form partnership with and to understand each client and each project; to know what is valued and what constitutes success. It is only on that canvas can you start designing to a solution that will achieve results, meaningfully break the rules and bring joy to the guests experiencing it.

Guests have great expectations and want personalized experiences. It's about how all of the elements play together and this is the space where clients sometimes go astray with their line item budgets. The beverages served at the bar matter as much as the bar they are being served from. The stage set is only as good as the lighting. The ability of the general session to successfully drive home the desired result is directly proportional to how much is invested in the guest's experience of the space, not just the content. Line item budgets don't always provide the necessarily peripheral vision to understand how to wrap all the elements together.

The other place where we see clients challenged is in this world of instantly searchable solutions and they try to understand who they are and what it is they are really shopping for. Are they looking for a service which will design them a solution? Or do they want to buy some pretty stuff for their party? Those are not the same thing.

RYAN HANSON
CREATIVE PRODUCER
BEEVENTS

SHARING ON SOCIAL

I think social media is not only a platform for designers to showcase their work, but it's a great place to look for inspiration, and quite honestly stay motivated and eager to keep coming up with fresh designs. The Minneapolis events community has some really talented designers that I personally follow to not only see what cool installations are happening around our great community, but also to educate myself on different ways of viewing local event spaces.

JEN HANSEN, EVENT SPECIALIST, EVENT LAB

Social media capture, whether your clients are on track with their social media presence or not, is what attendees are already asking for at events. Guests are already posting and engaging on social media whether or not the client is. It puts some pressure on clients to take a hard look at their online presence and we're constantly looking to tie elements in our event design to creating those positive touch points to activate that social presence. It's a major focus for designers now and its going to continue to dominate the conversation and dictate event design budgets of the future.

HANA APRIL CHUGHTAI,
FOUNDER, HANA APRIL INC.



Designing for Instagram is our jam. It allows us to create mini worlds, one at a time, to communicate our client's theme or message; it's a literal snapshot that allows us to focus in on the story we're telling—and the beauty of it is people are spreading that message because they love how it looks on their feed.

CARLY VAN VELDHUIZEN
OWNER, GIRL FRIDAY

We're finding that most clients see a photo backdrop or 'Instagram moment' as a staple in their event—which is a shift from even a few years ago. We've received requests lately not only for photo backdrops, but photo opportunities that can be interactive for the guest as well. Instagram not only serves as a constantly updated portfolio of our work, but as a way for our clients to show off their event and how much people have enjoyed their work.

EMMA GEARY
CLIENT MANAGER
GIRL FRIDAY

The focus these days is on over-the-top installations and focal points instead of the little details—designing an event that's going to engage all of the senses to create a memorable experience.

HANA APRIL CHUGHTAI, FOUNDER, HANA APRIL INC.

PHOTO: JOE SZURZEWSKI PHOTOGRAPHY, LLC;
(OPPOSITE) SADIE'S COUTURE FLORAL; GIRL FRIDAY



Sadie's Couture Floral created a living wall for the D'Amico Family Dinner.

Flower Power

Nothing livens up a place quite like a beautiful display of fresh flowers and greenery. With the rise of plants walls, which have been sprouting up everywhere from office buildings to restaurants, planners can get creative with these installations to serve multiple purposes at their event.

"People love the unique styling of plant walls along with the option to have photo backdrops," says Melissa Stratton, owner and creative director of Sadie's Couture Floral. "A lot of our clients use plant walls for opportunities to hang their logo or messages on them along with photo backdrops." To save money, Stratton says planners can rent or create their own boxwood panels for live plant walls.

Other trends Stratton predicts this fall are rusty tones with small accents

of greenery and textured modern designs. "I'm anticipating more moody tones with modern textures and smaller hints of greenery," she says. "We are also seeing meeting planners adding more floral in their stage designs. We're creating floral arrangements for podiums, sides of stages and the back of stages."

When it comes to staying on budget, Stratton recommends that clients be up front about their ideal budget with the designer. "They should come up with stylish options for you. Pick a floral company that represents the style you are looking for."

Get Connected

SADIE'S COUTURE FLORAL
sadiesfloral.com | 651.707.7689

BRANDING & CUSTOM INSTALLATIONS

At the heart of it, brand or campaign activations share the same goals as social events or fundraisers—our client wants to communicate who they are and how they want you to feel. We help create atmospheres that convey a client's story without saying a word.

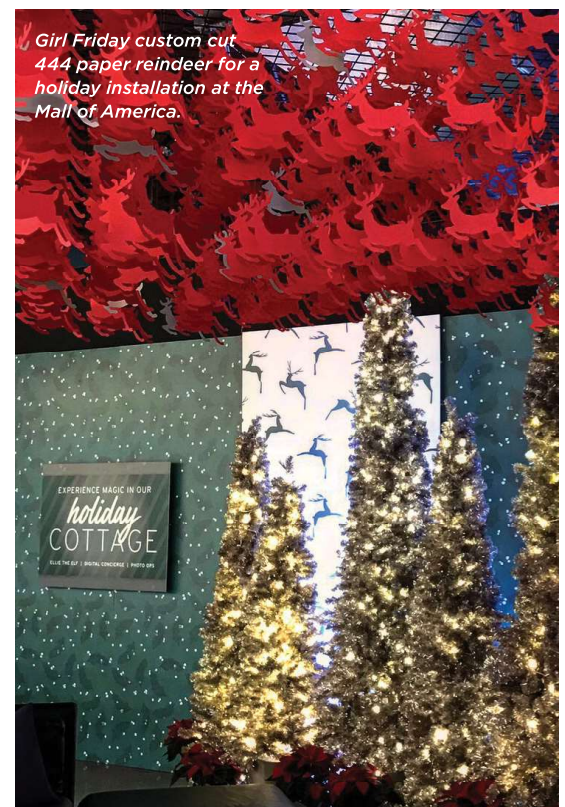
—Carly Van Veldhuizen, owner, *Girl Friday*

We're driven by the motto, 'We create art installations to delight and surprise.' That's exactly what we try and bring to each piece we create. Ideally, our work should help create buzz about the client, their event, or the launch of what they're promoting.

—Emma Geary, client manager, *Girl Friday*

Typically when I get a request for custom installations it's because a client wants to incorporate branding into the event design. Big impact pieces, such as stage designs/backdrops have been very popular, in addition to welcome/entrance pieces; something that is a 'wow' that guests will remember. ... It can be as simple as a company logo etched in a floral centerpiece vase, drum chandelier lights hung from the ceiling, or even a table cling.

—Jen Hansen, event specialist, *Event Lab*



Girl Friday custom cut 444 paper reindeer for a holiday installation at the Mall of America.

GRABBING ATTENTION
& MAINTAINING

Engagement

With attendees being so attached to their electronic devices, we get a lot of requests for events that allow attendees to utilize technology as much as possible. For example: photo booths with instant social media sharing, mobile bidding for silent auctions, hashtags to follow event moments, tablet bars for interactive trivia, virtual reality, and let's not forget charging stations to keep all of these features possible. Clients want to see innovative and fresh ideas, concepts that are outside of the box and really keep attendees engaged ... what better way to engage them than with the technology they are already using?

JEN HANSEN
EVENT SPECIALIST EVENT LAB

Less stuff, better experience

It's a hard time being in the décor business because most events aren't seeking décor anymore. Everyone has grabbed onto the experience as the piece that matters, so the focus is on personalized experiences for the guests attending. They want shareable moments—think immersively designed, interactive photo and video booth experiences. Guests want spaces which feel authentic and vibrant in their own character; accented by comfy furniture and a remarkable bar which is serving even better drinks. Guests want ways to connect, play and participate as they see fit. Those environmental design elements are the pieces driving event décor right now.

RYAN HANSON
CREATIVE PRODUCER
BEEVENTS

The scope/type of event really determines how I would try and grab attendees' attention and engage them within the event. If it's a large event (attendee count plus venue) I think incorporating a large impact décor piece is important as small details may get lost amongst the large experience. However, if it's an intimate board dinner, I'm all about the small details ranging from customized coasters, place cards, and who doesn't love a customized menu printed on the cloth dinner napkin! Whether large or small scale, attendees all seem to enjoy interactive entertainment, maybe a door greeter dressed to the nines to usher guests to their seat, or a trapeze artist swinging from the ceiling!

JEN HANSEN
EVENT SPECIALIST
EVENT LAB

The proliferation of experiences among a millennial crowd and their native digital ability to capture and keep those experiences at their fingertips continually holds down the pressure button influencing all types of events.

There is a high level of expectation in every guest because the experience of everyday life has been cranked up. The rule book for how we've always done it is readily up for disruption and the choice for clients is do they want to proceed as they always have or try something else? Events that work are those that are designed well to share a message among a cohort of individuals who have the capacity to pay attention. Doing that well requires event professionals and vendor partners who understand the dynamic and want to work towards each project's needed solution, not just last week's event dusted off with a new logo on the signage.

RYAN HANSON
CREATIVE
PRODUCER
BEEVENTS

Finding Inspiration

We absolutely look to platforms like Instagram and Pinterest for inspiration and to see what designers are doing around the globe. We want to look outside the Midwest market to see what's happening in Europe, Italy, Dubai or in Asia and discover how we might innovate our own twist on the trend. It's a great way to share ideas and to inspire each other.

—Hana April Chughtai, founder, Hana April Inc.

I'm really blessed to work amongst a really talented team of event designers not only within the walls of Event Lab, but also within the Minneapolis area. Using these masterminds as brainstorm buddies not only gets me through tough projects but inspires me. The events community is very talented and thanks to social media, I'm inspired by others work posted not only locally but nationally. I also love interior design so I tend to find a lot of tabletop inspiration from different interior design blogs, magazines and social media posts. What did we do before the internet? —Jen Hansen, event specialist, Event Lab



Surescripts' An Evening in Paris Gala by Hana April Inc.

PHOTOS: KENDRA OXENDALE: GIRL FRIDAY



GIRL FRIDAY on the BALLOON CRAZE

Balloons are joyful and, in mass, seem to create a sense of awe in people of all ages.

I like to think the way we install them adds to the sense of wonder—especially if we can do it in a way that seems to defy gravity or make them look like they're traveling or moving when they're still. —Carly Van Veldhuizen, owner

We love working with balloons because they can be so easily customized to our client with different shapes, colors, and uses throughout their event. Plus, it's easy to make a huge impact. And they're biodegradable, so it's fantastic in terms of sustainability! —Emma Geary, client manager



Clockwise from top left: Girl Friday's ceiling installation for the ILEA Minneapolis-St. Paul Chapter's 13th annual Star Awards; 2018 AVI Systems' Avengers-themed annual sales meeting by Hana April Inc.; 2016 Children's Theatre Company Curtain Call Ball by BeEvents; Event Lab's 25th Anniversary; Starkey Hearing Foundation's inaugural Summer Sounds Benefit by Bungalow 6 Design and Events with paper butterfly installation by Girl Friday



Trends Today

Everyone always seems to want the newest thing on the market, but it's important to ensure that the new is slowly integrated into what a group is used to. Many clients that I work with say, 'if it's not broke, why fix it' ... which is true, but **slowly incorporating new trends is important to guest retention (especially in a fundraising event setting) and to the energy of the event, it's what keeps guests coming back year after year.** I also think if new trends are embraced, they should be discussed in detail during the pre-planning stages of the planning process to ensure that the budget can support the change. **Keep in mind, embracing change/trends doesn't always have to cost money!**

—Jen Hansen, event specialist, Event Lab

In & Upcoming

MIX & MATCH SEATING

I personally really enjoy mixing and matching guest seating arrangements. For example, for a large corporate dinner/gala I like to bring in oversized harvest tables paired with traditional dining rounds. This adds additional texture to an event space, breaking up a standard sea of round tables. I also typically like to have at least two different centerpiece options when dressing over 20 tables, adding dimension and sometimes height to a centerpiece if the venue ceiling allows for it. —Jen Hansen, event specialist, Event Lab

Innovative seating styles are on the way. People, especially in the Minnesota market, are not getting creative when it comes to floor plans, but there's so much more to experiment with than rectangulars and rounds to change the attendee experience. Guests may be walking in expecting a sea of rounds but there's so much to play around with things like lounge seating, square options, harvest tables, X-style floor plans and more to create surprising seating styles. —Hana April Chughtai, founder, Hana April Inc.

COLORS & PRINTS

Bold color patterns or styles and bright, intense color palettes are on their way back as well as the more clean, monotone looks. Make no mistake, an all-white event without color to break things up is a bold look. —Hana April Chughtai, founder, Hana April Inc.

Neutrals are always safe, and gold keeps hanging on, but color has made a great comeback. Reading the tea leaves of this exact moment: the faux greenery, tropical plants and flowers and early '90s Miami-style prints which have cannibalized retail this year suggest bold prints and patterns are soon to show up in events.

—Ryan Hanson, creative producer, BeEvents

Painted and dyed floral, fall or '80s colors like mustard and forest green, nontraditional venues and installation-type décor from balloons to flagging tape are on their way in.

—Todd Pinzuti, owner, Bungalow 6 Design and Events

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I think repeating one design element has much more impact than a bunch of minimal décor moments. Flagging tape is huge design trend and I have used it on many projects.

—Todd Pinzuti, owner, Bungalow 6 Design and Events

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INTERACTIVITY

We've started to receive requests for installations that can be more interactive. It could be an artful way to ask a big question and get answers from participants or finding ways to truly immerse someone into a piece of art. While we all know a great event is about creating an experience, we're seeing clients that are looking to add an even higher level of meaning to their events—sending stronger messages that push the envelope.

—Emma Geary, client manager, Girl Friday

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With platforms like Instagram—it's so instantaneous and you can actually see the event and feel like you're actually walking through it—I think that's where things will continue to become more immersive. Videos are the next level for events. People won't just see photos of the event after it happened, they're being guided through it online.

—Hana April Chughtai, founder, Hana April Inc.

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I think we'll continue to see photo opportunities and interactive installations, but they'll be more organically incorporated into events. Rather than having a photo booth, we might create a more encompassing lounge that feels less intentioned, but every bit as photographed.

—Carly Van Veldhuizen, owner, Girl Friday

Out

I see chair covers making an exit and trendy chairs being brought into venues to replace standard banquet chairs.

—Jen Hansen, event specialist, Event Lab

Ceiling draping is on its way out. People are looking to spend their money on other, more impactful elements to achieve different looks throughout the evening than just drapery, although there is definitely a time and place for that. —Hana April Chughtai, founder, Hana April Inc.

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While farm to table is still hot in F&B, farm décor is giving way to a cleaner, more urban-industrial vibe.

—Ryan Hanson, creative producer, BeEvents

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Blush color palettes, hanging greens, crystal chandeliers, filament bulbs and donut walls are on their way out.

—Todd Pinzuti, owner, Bungalow 6 Design and Events

GET CONNECTED

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