

Whatever you need while in Vegas, from a gourmet meal to a pal for Fido ...

The butler *does* it

BY JAMIE HELMICK
Vegas.com

Imagine planning a wedding proposal in Las Vegas. You've booked a suite, flown in early, everything's set except one thing — you forgot to buy a ring.

Who do you call?

If you're among a select set of Vegas elite, you call your butler.

Unlike the stereotypical butlers of movies and books, Sin City butlers are anything but stuffy — and if there's anything you need, weddings rings included, they'll do their best to deliver — within reason, of course.

Wayne Woo, a butler at Skylofts at MGM Grand, said he was once faced with that exact predicament — a guest had booked a room to propose to his girlfriend, but had no ring.

Woo and the rest of the butler staff at Skylofts scrambled, calling the on-staff jeweler for the property and in less than a day, a ring had been crafted, one that even matched the guest's 2-carat requirement and incorporated his design ideas, Woo said.

Racing around trying to procure a wedding ring might sound like an extreme way to make a living, but Woo said that's part of the fun of being a butler.

"Every day is different, you don't know what tomorrow is going to be," he said.

There are some things that stay the same from day to day though and that's staying on top of the guest's needs and making their stay memorable, Woo said.

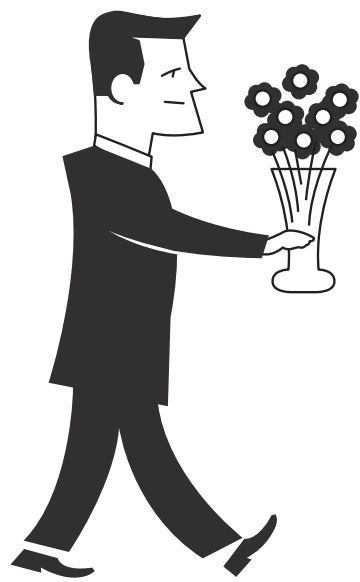
At Skylofts, this can be anything from stocking the room with a certain beverage to making sure the guest has the correct pillow on his bed.

If a guest wants food from five different restaurants, Woo and his fellow butlers put it together, Woo said.



Reservations? "Reservations are easy," Woo said. It's when a guest wants cupcakes from one place and fast food from another that things get a little more tricky.

And it's not just Skylofts going the extra mile for its high-end guests — several properties in town offer butlers to their elite clientele,



including the Hard Rock Hotel.

Valentino Crespo is a master butler at the Hard Rock, who prides himself on the level of service he provides his guests.

Crespo said with certain celebrities, it can take him up to a week just to prep for their upcoming visit. This can include rounding up the toiletries a guest prefers, setting the television to a preferred channel or bringing in the books a guest likes.

Once the guest has arrived, Crespo's job gets even more intense. Crespo, who's trained in a number of skills, including gourmet cooking, wine selection and even martial arts, may spend whole days on property at the Hard Rock (the hotel provides him with a room) catering to the needs of guests.

Although his day often consists of preparing hot tubs with chocolate and flowers or shining a guest's shoes or cooking a guest's meal tableside, occasionally there are some more outlandish requests, Crespo said.

He once had to draw a bath full of goat milk for a guest, he said.



Illustrations by Chris Morris

A repeat guest at the Hard Rock stays in the second bedroom, while Crespo and his staff have prepared the master bedroom for the guest's dog, he said. They'll put dog movies on the TV and bring in fine food for the pet.

"The dog is eating caviar and champagne," Crespo said. "Somebody's living the good life."

But why spend days catering to someone else?

"We're hopefully making an experience to last for a lifetime," Crespo said. "When you can do that for another human being, you've reached the pinnacle of your career."

And Vegas is the place to do that for a butler, Woo said.

"Being a butler in Las Vegas is pretty much the highest level you can reach," he said. "With any other career you want to reach the top, the same [with being a butler]."

Plus, as Crespo puts it, "a butler has a cool job. He's a master of everything."

To become a "master of everything," butlers undergo training in several different areas. Both Woo and Crespo said they've taken classes in everything from etiquette to how to speak properly and, in Crespo's case, how to pack and unpack luggage.

"[The classes] focus on everything

from language to posture to how you talk," Woo said. "It's pretty detailed and they thrive on consistency."

Even with all the training, there are still hundreds of challenges that face a butler, something that Crespo said he enjoys. Whether it's finding a guest Lebanese food or escorting them to a nightclub, Crespo said trying to "make difficult times easy and coordinate everything...the challenge of that gives me an excitement."

Plus, the duties of a butler need to look effortless.

Woo said that even if it takes five butlers to assemble a meal for a guest, only the butler assigned to that guest will deliver it. And just like Crespo, who will stay on call 24 hours for certain clients, Woo will stay late or work a specific day at the request of a guest.

All this is also done in a tuxedo or suit, and often in gloves.

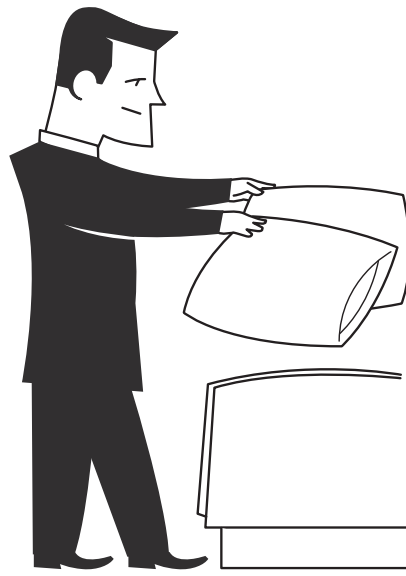
"I'll be dressed in a tuxedo and cook a whole meal right front of the guest," Crespo said.

And because many of the clients who warrant butlers are businessmen, butlers need to not only be able to do their own duties, but they need to know a little bit about the guests as well.

"Every day on the way to work, I have to listen to the news and know

the current events," Woo said. "A conversation I would have with the guest is, 'What do you think of the bailout [with GM]? I need to know what's going on.'"

Although pay scale can vary for butlers, Woo said he was so interested in the potential of becoming a butler that he took a pay cut to become an assistant butler when he first started



at Skylofts.

Crespo said he is under contract with the Hard Rock and with his base salary and bonuses, he's happy — meaning he doesn't accept tips or gifts. He'll pass them along to butlers on his staff though, he said.

"This way I'm just giving something to my customers," Crespo said. "Everybody wants something, I just want them to come back."

It's that kind of attitude that creates repeat guests, Crespo said.

"Not even money can buy this service if people aren't trained to that," he said.

And whether it's helping along a marriage proposal or pampering a spoiled dog, it all comes down to what the butlers can do for you.

"If we can do it, we do it," Woo said.

And are there any limits to that? "If we can do it legally, we do it," he said.

