The Language of Balloon Art

AN EVENT PLANNER’S GLOSSARY TO BALLOON DÉCOR TERMS AND CONCEPTS

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Introduction

Who Am I?  My name is Rachel Porter and I am the owner/operator of Balloon Splendor. Since 1994, I have been designing and creating event décor in the Seattle area for corporate and non-profit companies. I earned the CBA designation in 2006 and live in the beautiful Skagit Valley with my husband. My passion is helping businesses and corporate planners achieve their event goals through creative use of balloon décor.

How can balloon décor help you?  In many ways. The art of balloon decor has greatly evolved over the last 10 years, becoming a powerful and artistic medium in which to carry branding forward in creative and unique ways. Besides, balloons make people happy, and happy people are better workers, attendees and customers!

Why is this book necessary, you may ask?  As with any industry, jargon abounds. While there has been an attempt within our industry to speak the language of the customer, there are terms that we use regularly to mean specific designs. This eBook hopefully helps to bridge the gap between the picture in your head and what I “see” in my mind based on your descriptions.

Most of the terms in this book are descriptive of the individual design elements – arch, column, swag, for example. I’ve included other terms that are used broadly in our industry, as well as a few I use specifically. For example “Window of Opportunity”. If I ask you, what is the window of opportunity to install, what I mean is, what is the absolute earliest I can start and the latest by which the décor need to be completed. Why would I ask such a question? I may have several events that day, or knowing Seattle traffic, I may be factoring in travel time. The window of opportunity for installing also affects the décor I offer you, as I aim to never disappoint and to always exceed expectations.

If you come across a term or concept you don’t understand, please, by all means, share it with me, and I may add it to my eBook. For if you don’t understand a term your balloon artist used, chances are others don’t either. And, it’s an opportunity the artists have to communicate more clearly.

The terms are arranged alphabetically, and there are lots of pictures for clarity. The table of contents has hyperlinks to the corresponding entries.

May this book be beneficial to you when you consider balloon décor for your next event!
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Air-filled Décor - Décor that utilizes air or nitrogen instead of helium. This décor will not float, but using framing and various techniques will last much longer than helium filled décor and is infinitely more versatile. If a venue says balloons are not allowed, the restriction often times applies to helium filled balloons only.

Balloon Arch - The most well known form of balloon décor next to the balloons on string. Arches can be framed or unframed, and be made in a variety of patterns and shapes. The most common is the spiral arch, though it’s not necessarily always the best choice for the space. A series of arches form a tunnel.

Arcing Columns – Balloon columns on a bent frame such that it creates two halves of an arch.
**Balloon Arrangements** – See Balloon Bouquets

**Balloon Bouquets** – This is a group of helium filled balloons arranged and tied to a weight of some sort. Bouquets can be placed on the table as a centerpiece or on the floor.

![Balloon Bouquets](image1.jpg)

**Balloon Clusters** – See Balloon Bouquets.

**Balloon Cascades** – See Balloon Bouquets.

**Balloon Columns** – Free standing balloon structure where groups of balloons are set directly on top of each other in various ways. There are many different shapes and patterns that the column could have, though the most widely known is the spiral pattern.

![Balloon Columns](image2.jpg)

**Balloon Drop**- Often seen on New Year’s Eve or at political conventions. There is a bag of balloons on the ceiling, and at a given cue, a cord is pulled releasing all the balloons inside.

![Balloon Drop](image3.jpg)

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**Balloon Entertainer** - A person that makes figures and shapes out of the long skinny balloons- usually as a form of entertainment. They are called “twisters” because they twist balloons together to form those shapes and sculptures.

**Balloon Figure** – A balloon creation that resembles a person, animal or thing that is unframed. Typically these are small, hand-held, or incorporated into décor as details and embellishments. This term also includes the body of creations balloon entertainers produce using primarily non-round balloons. See Twisted Balloons.

**Balloon Pillars** – See Balloon Columns

**Balloon Shine** – a topical treatment for latex balloons to slow down the Oxidation process. In other words, it keeps latex balloon shiny for several days, delaying the patina latex balloons develop over time. Not effective for outdoor décor or décor in smoky, dusty environments.

**Balloon Towers** – See Balloon Columns or Balloon Bouquets

**Balloon Trees**- See Balloon Bouquets. To a professional decorator this is probably going to be taken as an actual tree made from balloons- like a palm tree or an apple tree.

**Balloon Umbrella** – A Balloon Bouquet where the balloons are arranged at the same height, creating an umbrella effect.
Balloon Wall - A wall made out of balloons. It can be made with a hard structure, like a steel grid, or made from a series of garland that is put together.

Base Plates – Steel plates with a pipe attached to it, used for keeping balloon arches, columns and sculptures in place. Base plates are rental items (unless specifically identified as disposable base plates). When details of striking an event are not clear, base plates may get tossed out and the client gets billed for replacement costs. Not a happy situation, so it’s important to understand what is disposable and what needs to be left behind for the balloon company to retrieve themselves.

Baubles – Small round balloon accents. Consider imprinting a logo or message onto the small balloons.

Bold Spiral Pattern – The spirals on the left are a Bold Spiral, the spiral on the right is a standard spiral. Applies to any Garland based design, primarily arches and columns.
**Branded Décor** - Balloon décor that features a brand, logo or slogan, or a sculpture that is in the shape of a logo. Legal permission from the brand holder is required to duplicate protected designs.

![Branded Décor Examples](image1)

**Bubble Balloon** – A plastic balloon that stays clear, never oxidizing. Also has a much longer life. Available in double bubble, prints and solid colors. Excellent choice for outdoor décor. Vibrant colors stay looking fresh, never dulling.

![Bubble Balloon Examples](image2)

**Bulk Balloons** – Helium inflated balloons delivered in bulk. An application may be tying the balloons to easels, directional signs or other items, or letting them loose on flat ceilings.

![Bulk Balloons Examples](image3)
California Balloon Laws – these are laws in California that govern how mylar, or foil balloons are used. The main points of the law is that every foil balloon should be individually tied to an anchor, that they shouldn’t be grouped together, and that nothing that conducts electricity should be attached to a balloon that is filled with a gas that is lighter than air (helium for example). Even though at present only California has these laws, it is considered best practices to abide by them in any state.

CBA – Certified Balloon Artist – this is a certification awarded to an individual after an intensive set of written and practical exams. This designation is recognized worldwide.

Ceiling Balloons – see Bulk Balloons. However, letting balloons loose on a ceiling does have special considerations – texture of the ceiling, fixtures such as fans, lights, HVAC vents, fire suppression systems and security systems to name a few.

Classic Décor – This is simple lines and colors - arches, swags and columns. This type of décor is really effective for adding ambiance or covering large spaces.

Collar – 4 small balloons placed under a larger balloon. Used as an accent or embellishment. Great way to add an accent color and other details. Consider top-printing a logo on them to reinforce a brand.
Column Based Sculpture - this style of balloon sculpture is based on a single baseplate and pole, and uses a technique of varying the balloon size to create the sculpture.

Criss Cross Canopy – See Open Canopy

Deco-Twisting – This is industry jargon referring to a decorator who brings non-round (or long skinny balloon) elements into their décor. Using the blend of techniques, a balloon pro can get incredible detail and lines added to their décor.

Double Bubble – the practice of putting one balloon inside a clear balloon for a layered “how did they do that!” look.

Drop – A term for delivering balloon décor and leaving it at a designated area. Client then places décor at will. Usually involves bouquets or bulk balloons only. Not to be confused with Balloon Drop.
Fantasy Flowers - Creating flowers out of un-inflated balloons, often with wires inside each balloon. Using this technique, incredibly real looking flowers can be created that will last much longer than live florals.

Float Time - The length of time that a helium filled balloon will float. Depending on the brand, this could be from 16-20 hours for an 11” balloon. If it’s treated with Hi-Float this can be increased dramatically, even for weeks. Decorator grade balloons will last much longer than party store grade balloons, which may float for only a few hours from time of inflation.

Floating Kites – See Giant Balloon Topiary

Focal Points – Areas that you want to specifically highlight or draw attention to. Entrances, stages, product tables, the bar or buffet area.

Foil Balloons - the correct term for what is more popularly referred to as “mylar” balloons. The term “mylar” actually belongs to the DuPont company, and they haven’t used it to make balloons for a very long time. Foil balloons can be Air Filled and wrapped onto a Frame décor that needs to last a long time, even months.

Framing – The internal structure of a balloon sculpture, arch or column. Sometimes disposable, sometimes not. Be sure ownership of all framing is clear between you and the balloon company.
**Full Canopy** – Like an Open Canopy except the dome created with balloons is solid.

**Garland** – A string of balloons made by packing groups of balloons on top of each other. Can be made with air or helium. Garland that is un-framed and air-filled will hang, helium filled garland will form an arch. Commonly seen in spiral or other patterned arches and columns.

**Giant Balloon Topiary** – 3’ balloon with quads and/or ribbon accents.
Gumball Balloon – A larger balloon with smaller balloons inside. Typically a 3’ balloon with dozens of smaller ones. Ask about how these can be small balloon drops.

Hardware – all metalwork used in balloon décor including Framing and Base Plates. Usually ownership belongs to the balloon company, so be clear if the hardware used is being rented or purchased.

Hi-Float- An additive that can be added to the inside of a latex balloon to extend its float time. It’s similar to Elmer’s glue in that it is a non-toxic polymer gel. It seals the pores of the balloon, thereby keeping the helium inside for a longer period of time. It can extend the float time of an 11” balloon from 18 hours to a couple of weeks. It is not recommended for outdoor use.

Installation Date and Time – May not be event date. Some installations take days. Some vendors ask that they be the only ones in the venue to setting up, which cuts into balloon installation time. Often, we can work in a corner of the room building décor, and when the other vendors are done, we can move décor into place. The more information I have regarding the installation schedule, the better I can design and staff to make your vision happen.

Linking Balloons – A type of balloon that have an extra tail on the end so that they can be tied together in chains.
Megaloons – Large foil balloons in the shape of numbers and letters. This is a brand name, but Betallic had a first to market advantage, and the term is often used even when other brands are being used.

Open Canopy - Often used as a dance floor treatment, it is characterized typically by having 4 columns around the dance floor, and string of pearl arches jumping from one arch to the next.

Oxidation – the dull patina latex balloons develop over time. Sunlight speeds up the process. What’s actually happening is the latex is starting to decompose. There are treatments that can be applied to keep the balloons shiny. See Balloon Shine.

Puff Ball – See Topiary

Pearl Arch – See String of Pearls Arch

Pom Pom – see Topiary Ball
Rainbow Arch - Which do you mean? A Rainbow made out of balloons, or an arch with the colors of the rainbow in it?

Reverse Spiral – Applies to Arches. The spiral pattern reverses in the center creating a focal point. The point will naturally point up from one perspective (say the front) and down from the other perspective (the back).

Rigging – Hanging or securing décor beyond using Base Plates and Frames. If décor is to be suspended, additional information will be requested regarding the venue and any union/liability. Site visits may be required.

Roman Columns – see Sculpted Columns

Quad – Two duplets twisted together, most arches, columns and garland is based on quads stacked together.
Round vs. Non Round Balloons – Industry jargon referring to either the round balloons that most people are used to seeing in arches or floating and the long skinny balloons often used by clowns or balloon entertainers. There is a growing trend in the industry to combine both types of balloons for a unique look, more detail, and to create different types of lines.

Scallops – Entertainer balloons attached to round balloons or inserted into garlands such that it creates a scalloped detail.

Sculpted Columns – (Greek/Roman/Princess Columns)- Balloon columns where the top and bottom layers of balloons have a wider girth than the center layers of balloons.
Sculptures - A sculpture, generally speaking, is a balloon figure with framework, thus is generally larger than a hand held or mounted figure. Sculpture are generally 3D renditions of something and can be interactive (walk through sculpture like the fish below for example.

SDS - A grid system that can be used to make columns, arches and walls. Named after its inventor, the full name is Skistimas Design System, but everyone calls it SDS.

Spiked Topiary – A very elegant version of the Topiary, made with Foil Tapers.

Spiral Arch - See Balloon Arch
Spiral Topiary - A centerpiece style that uses a metal frame that goes around and around in a spiral pattern. They are very tall and elegant, but have a lot of rhythm and negative space.

Spray – Many Entertainer balloons “spraying” out. Used as column accents, greenery for jungle garden themes for example, or as ceiling décor. Add some attitude with Baubles or Flowers.

Square Pack – A Garland made with two different sizes of Quads. Creates clean linear lines.
Squiggles – Curling entertainer balloons used as accents.

Strike- A term borrowed from the theater industry, it means to take down and remove all décor we installed.

Stripe Pattern – Applies to arches and columns. One of many patterns achieved with a Garland.

String of Pearl Arch- A line of balloons where you see the full balloon next to another full balloon, next to another. It’s not as full as a spiral arch. Can be a bit more elegant than the traditional spiral arch.
Swirls – An entertainer balloon loosely wrapped around a round balloon as an accent.

Topiary - Balloons tied together into a round shape that can either be filled with helium and floated, or air-filled and hung, or placed on poles.

Topiary Centerpiece – A specific style of balloon centerpiece that is commonly air-filled and supported by a pole or stand.

© Designs and photo by Anne McGovern, Elegant Balloons
**Tunnel** - A 3-dimensional structure that people can walk through, often used at the entrance to a room. A tunnel can be made from a series of arches, either string of pearl or garland arches. Other popular ways to make tunnels are with linking balloons or RMS.

**Twisted Balloons** - The figures made from the long skinny balloons that are twisted together. To distinguish between the output of a balloon entertainer (twisted balloons) and non-round balloons used as décor (balloon figures).

**Twister** - See Balloon Entertainer

**Vignette** – A grouping of décor elements that creates a scene, focal point and often tells a story. Vignettes can do double duty as entrance décor and photo backdrop for example.
Weaving - A technique using the long skinny balloons to create a balloon fabric. This technique can be used for sculptures, and wearable balloon fashions. It is exactly as it sounds, where the balloons are woven together in a variety of fashions and shapes.

Window of Opportunity – The earliest date and time move in and installation can happen, and the time when the décor must be done and equipment loaded out. This window is critical to know before designing a décor package for your event.

I hope you have found this helpful! Feedback and comments are welcome.