

Cape Cod

MAGAZINE

8 New Looks

to freshen up
your wardrobe

Lisa Genova

on Mastering
Transition

**Rebirth
of an Idol**

Our exclusive
interview with
Siobhan
Magnus

Inspire Yourself

AN EXPERT'S GUIDE
to Hosting a *Stress Free Party*



PLANNING
THE
Perfect
Party

Think it's too much work? Four local experts chime in on how to make it happen.

Opening your home to friends, family, or business associates for a dinner party can result in laughter, joy, and lasting memories—or a load of stress for you, the hostess. Navigating the needs of your guests—from dietary restrictions to who gets to sit where can challenge even the most seasoned hostess. The good news, however, is that there are simple ways to minimize hassles and maximize enjoyment for both you and your guests. Do you want a formal, sit-down affair for 10 or a more casual buffet for a crowd? Once you have that in mind, there are some straightforward suggestions to help you succeed. We've gathered advice from a group of local experts in the fields of food, flowers, wine—and that sometimes sticky area of etiquette—to help you figure out how to host a wonderful party that your guests will long remember and that you can actually enjoy.

BY KARYN BOBER KUHN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN CUTRONA



Set the Scene with Flowers

Flowers can either complement—or overshadow—a setting. Meredith Fancy, owner of Fancy Flowers in Orleans, has been growing, selling, and arranging flowers on Cape Cod for more than 30 years. She no longer works from a storefront, but rather handles flowers for weddings and special events from her home—and business is booming as hostesses seek her help in putting together parties that will wow, but not overwhelm their guests. “I’m seeing a trend toward using just one, two, or three types of flowers in an arrangement, not the large mix of flowers we used to see in bouquets” she says. “People are choosing to use elegant flowers such as callas or orchids and letting their simplicity come through.”

Fancy recommends considering your table arrangement first when thinking

about flowers. For a larger or formal sit-down affair at a rectangular table, she says a nice way to present flowers is in three vases staggered down its length with candles in between. They all can be the same arrangement or variations of a theme. Round tables, though, look lovely with just one, perhaps larger, floral piece in the middle. For a more casual get together, she suggests using several, placed throughout the space. And when it comes to color she finds that whites and greens are popular now because of their neutrality. A truly elegant display pairs freesia, available in a variety of colors, with curly willow for a naturally graceful look. Also popular on Cape Cod are vases chock full of our signature blue hydrangeas.

And perhaps the best news of all is that truly stunning arrangements can be made without breaking the bank. “With the economy the way it is, I see a lot of people making use of the won-

derful selection of flowers available at grocery stores,” adds Fancy. “With some effort you can use them to make wonderful arrangements.”

Keep a Natural Flow with Wine

Your home looks warm and inviting, your friends surround you, and your table is bounteous. For many, however, this scene simply isn’t complete without wine flowing. No one agrees more than Orla Murphy-LaScola, co-owner and sommelier of American Seasons, the Nantucket restaurant whose wine list consistently wins awards for excellence and innovation.

“I believe that introducing your friends to new wines is fun and gives guests something to talk about,” says Murphy-LaScola. With that in mind, she offers suggestions for selecting, pairing,



Graciousness Sets Tone

Food, flowers, and wine can provide the core components of a dinner party to remember, but if you and your guests don't enjoy each other's company, what's the point? Cultural pressures to present a perfect setting can render a hostess frazzled and spoil a good time. So put that energy into thinking carefully, and lovingly, about your guests. The rest will follow.

"A great hostess is someone who is attentive to her guests' needs and makes them feel relaxed and comfortable," says Lisa Melchiorri, the founder and director of Etiquette & Manners, an East Falmouth-based company that provides etiquette and manners-training programs to children, adults, and corporate groups. Clear communication is a key factor that can make all the difference in your guest's comfort level, and therefore the success of a party. And that communication should start in the invitation.

and serving wines that will enhance the atmosphere of your dinner party. "Try the wine before the party and do not be surprised on the day of if the case you just bought is not what was described to you," says the sommelier.

Your selection of wines depends largely on the size of your gathering and the guests invited. Large parties require broad solutions. To that end, she recommends "whites that are fruit forward, but crisp and light and reds that have some depth and solid fruit on the front." Specifically, these reds might include Argentinean Malbecs or a blend, such as the La Posta Cocina Blend. For whites, she recommends pinot gris, such as Elk Cove from Oregon, or sauvignon

blanc, especially the Huia from New Zealand. And if the occasion calls for it, a sparkling wine can be a nice choice and a prosecco, such as the Ruggeri, is always a crowd pleaser.

Smaller parties provide more intimacy, but also require a little more active service. "Be mindful of keeping the flow of food and wine along the same pace by having someone make sure glasses are topped up as new food arrives," notes Murphy-LaScola.

When pairing wine with food, it's a good idea to serve the wine at least ten minutes before the course arrives. This way you and your guests can experience the wine without food then see how it changes when accompanied by food.



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Melchiorri recommends that you address details such as attire and gift giving directly in your invitation. Also, talking to your guests before the event can provide you with a clearer picture of their needs and preferences. One way to facilitate that conversation is to send an invitation with an R.S.V.P. asking for a phone response, during which you can talk to your guests about issues such as dietary restrictions and the appropriateness of children at the function.

When creating your guest list, keep in mind the interests and dynamics of those who will attend. "Part of being a good host or hostess is knowing the personalities of your guests and who will find who interesting," says Melchiorri. Remember that you are the common denominator for your guests. Plan well enough in advance so that you don't have to spend the evening in the kitchen.

And speaking of the meal itself, setting a table for a dinner party can not only unnerve even the most seasoned hostess, but also challenge your guests — and that's bad form. An elaborate place setting can include several different types of plates, glasses, and utensils, but it doesn't have to. A simple setting that includes a dinner fork, knife, spoon, dinner plate, napkin, and water glass can be simply elegant and easy to negotiate.

Tastefully Prepared

Perhaps the most daunting aspect of hosting a dinner party is...the dinner. What to serve? How much to make? According to Brenda Lee Diaz, owner of the Orleans-based Party Girls Cape Cod Catering company, the key word



here is planning. And effective planning requires organization.

"The single most important element of hosting a stress-free dinner party is organization," says Diaz. "Whether planning an event for four or 400 people the key is to be well prepared." Diaz, a self-taught chef who recently added Main Street Wine and Gourmet in Orleans to her culinary empire, says that even the at-home hostess can create an organizational process that works for her. She recommends keeping a dinner party three-ring binder with tried-and-true recipes you can call on as the occasion arises.

Diaz also says that a good hostess

doesn't have to be a gourmet cook, but she can personalize her offerings with simple and elegant touches. She urges fledgling hostesses to "serve one of the great pre-made appetizers on the market and add a homemade component to make it your own." That might include using a prepared spanakopita (Greek spinach pie), but finishing it with a homemade tzatziki sauce, which is a Greek yogurt-based sauce enhanced with lemon, mint, and dill. Transform prepared foods into elegant dishes by adding one or two expensive and delectable ingredients, such as truffle oil, without fussing for hours.

If you're feeding a large crowd, spend-

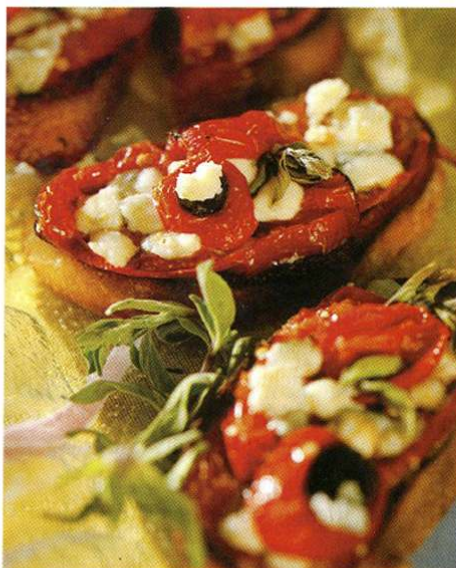
ing a fortune is probably not an option. Still, Diaz notes that you can serve a meal to remember. Stews, such as Beef Bourguignon and Coq au Vin, are wonderful because they can be made in advance of the party. "Do whatever you can ahead of time, including setting the table the night before and making dips and spreads," notes Diaz. But most importantly, she says, make sure you've prepared—and eaten—your recipes at least one time before you serve them to guests. 🌟

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