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BOOK IT

Cocktails, Anyone?

Get the party started right with hip ideas and festive menus for your next fete.

Look for solutions to your every "but I can't have a party!" plea in *Cocktail Parties with a Twist* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, \$30), by Alexandra and

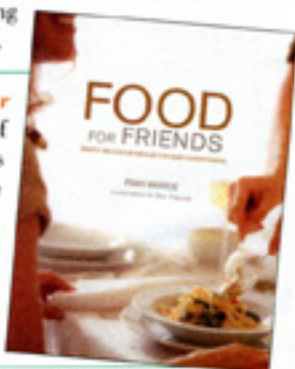
Eliot Angle, founders of Los Angeles' premier event-planning company, Aqua Vitae.

Just moved in to a new pad? Serve gussied-up takeout on good china with shandies (a lemon and beer concoction)—just make sure you've unpacked the stereo. Need to set the scene? Try some pretty lanterns to light the entryway. The take-away: Good times can be had by all if you, the hostess with the mostess, are having a good time yourself.



Ho-hum gatherings get the heave-ho in Cameron Tuttle's *The Bad Girl's Guide to the Party Life* (Chronicle Books, \$14.95). This sassily illustrated guide covers everything from theme parties (throw the Fake-Bake Party if you need a tropical island getaway in the middle of winter) to how to crash a soiree (bring a hostess gift!). See "Vixen-Mixen" tips to get you and the gals in the mood for just-the-chicks mischief. Think we're kidding? Do as Tuttle suggests and have friends bring their favorite "let it all hang out" food with enough forks to go around.

If hosting a dinner party sounds like punishment, turn to *Food for Friends* (Ryland Peters & Small, \$27.50), by Fran Warde. Full of down-to-earth recipes for simple, delicious meals, the book works from the reassuring notion that pulling off a great party doesn't have to mean eight weeks in the kitchen (forget baking your own bread!). Ideas include a no-cook antipasto picnic and a post-work dinner that literally takes minutes to prepare on the day it's given because of some clever pre-prep. (Hint: Set the table the night before—so you can chill before the main event.)



Dressed to Grill (Chronicle Books, \$16.95), by Karen Brooks, Diane Morgan and Reed Darmon, is packed with yummy recipes—for the grill or otherwise—with attitude. We love this one: Stockpile the authors' PMS Espresso-Chocolate-Walnut brownies in the freezer to nosh on when a crabby mood hits. ("Better than Motrin, and twice the fun," they write.) There's a wealth of other hilariously named recipes to try, like Mrs. Potato Head Salad, Pimm's Chic-o-Matic Champagne Cooler and Hot Girls Spice Rub.

Killer apps take center stage in *Finger Food* (Ryland Peters & Small, \$19.95), by Elsa Petersen-Schepelern. Lush photographs will inspire you, a practical party countdown will prepare you, and a host of international tidbits, like Thai crabcakes and Tandoori chicken, will knock your guests off their feet! Super Bowl special: Casual pub fare (fish and chips, hamburgers) gets a shot of elegance when daintily downsized.—Rebecca Brazerman

