

O

THE OPRAH
MAGAZINE

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YOU'RE INVITED!

OUR PARTY HANDBOOK

- What to wear, serve, sip
- Who to invite, and how to keep them happy
- The best hostess gifts
- A feast made easy—honest!

2 QUESTIONS

that could change your life

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It's more than
diet and exercise

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You won't believe
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29 holiday strategies

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His stuff, your stuff...
together at last

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Green Tea Collins

Aqua Vitae, Los Angeles

- In a shaker, combine 2 ounces vodka, 2 ounces strong green tea (cooled), 1 ounce fresh lemon juice, $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. grated fresh ginger, 1 tsp. simple sugar syrup.*

- Shake and strain into a tall glass with ice. Garnish with lime or lemon wheel. Makes 1 serving.

*To make syrup: Mix equal parts—about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of each—sugar and water in a saucepan over low heat; stir until sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes.





PARTY THROWING

PENELOPE GREEN asks the experts: How do you guarantee a good time?

GREAT PARTIES ARE GIFTS FROM THE heart: They succeed when we give ourselves to one another, host to guest and back again. From a last-minute bash to a sit-down dinner for 12 or a cocktail party for 50, there are a million ways to bring people together. Our completely unscientific polling of some great hosts and party professionals has uncovered ten inspired, can't-miss secrets to giving a terrific party.

1 Do not be afraid to invite a circus.

Be brave with your guest list, and mix as many generations, job disciplines, neighborhoods, and incomes as you can rope in. Consider the idea that as a host, you're suddenly in the business of serving people to one another. Culinary personality Nigella Lawson, of the Style network cooking show *Nigella Bites*, says, "I like to have a few new friends, a few old friends, and the grown-ups, if you know what I mean." Pat Towers, *O's* features director, who's renowned for her parties, says she always has one wild card. "When

there's another aspect brought into the familiar, it gets people stimulated, puts them on their toes," she says. "And then we see the best in each other and are reminded why we like one another so much."

2 Upend the party formula.

"People get hung up on trying to do things right, and they lose the point of a party, which is to have fun," says Ilene Rosenzweig, coauthor with the fashion designer Cynthia Rowley of the witty decorating guide *Home Swell Home* (Atria). "Make something surprising happen. For a birthday party for my boyfriend, Rick, who loves macaroni and cheese, I ordered ten mac and cheeses from local restaurants. We voted on the best one." Rosenzweig has other ideas on the subject: Play games. You might have a Ping-Pong tournament before dinner or a round of Two Truths and a Lie afterward (make three statements, and everyone votes on which is the lie). Have a paper party—no china or glasses—and for placemats use pages torn from a steamy

novel. (For more party-pepping ideas, see "What a Swell Party This Is," page 200.)

3 Give your guests something to do.

Most people like to play an active role at a party. You can harness this impulse to your advantage. "I like to put a group of my friends together; I call them my hospitality team," says Bryan Rafanelli, an event planner in Boston. "I give them each someone to meet, to take care of. The bigger the party, the bigger the hospitality team." Shier friends might like to pour drinks or clear plates.

4 The music matters.

This is your party's backbeat, so if your collection is less than stellar, why not ask your invitees to bring a CD they think you ought to have. Hire a DJ or, says Rafanelli, just play these five CDs over and over: *After the Playboy Mansion*, by Dimitri from Paris ("Great pop, loungey and cool"); *Samba Soul 70!* ("Cocktail, not totally authentic samba"); *Ultra Chilled 01* ("A great house-y feel but sophisticated



MADE EASY

enough so that if you're 55 you won't be turned off"); *Waltz for Koop by Koop* ("Remixed waltzes, which sounds dreadful, but it's pretty cool"); *Verve Remixed* ("Modern spin to jazz classics").

5 Embrace wretched excess. Lots of food, lots of drink, and lots of ice and garnishes are key; it's a bore to run out of anything. More is more fun. "If you can't afford a full bar," says Elizabeth Allen, an event planner with offices in Boston and Manhattan, "have red and white wines and a novelty cocktail." (For suggestions see "Cocktails, Anyone?" on page 198.)

6 Disregard tip # 5. If your party is small enough, try giving guests absolutely no options whatsoever. Amanda Hesser, a *New York Times* food writer and the author of *The Cook and the Gardener* (Norton), says people are creatures of habit, "and yet if introduced to something new, they will try it." Hesser likes to serve Kir Royales (add one or two teaspoons of crème de cassis to each glass of champagne), and eschews hors

d'oeuvres. "I want my guests to be hungry for dinner," she says.

7 Plan your bar. Katie Brown, lifestyle guru of the Style network, suggests setting up three self-serve bars: a wine bar, a vodka bar, and a Cosmopolitan bar, for example. Alexandra and Elliot Angle, event designers and the authors of *Cocktail Parties with a Twist* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang), like to gussy up a novelty cocktail bar by setting a little table with a pitcher of, say, Green Tea Collins mix (see "Cocktails, Anyone?" on page 198 for the recipe), vintage glasses, garnishes, and instructions on how to put the thing together properly.

8 Know your guests, and seat them properly. "At the end of the day, this is what makes the party work," says Rena Sindl, a party lover and the author of *Be My Guest: Theme Party Savoir-Faire* (Assouline). "You want to give everyone the best seat for them. I never put couples together, or best friends." Preston Bailey, the author of *Preston Bailey's Design for Entertaining* (Bulfinch Press/Little, Brown

and Company), likes dinner for 20 at a long, long refectory table. His gambit is to switch seating at each course. "And I like to have many courses," he says. "Instead of three, I have eight. All that moving really gets people talking."

9 Set your stage properly. Lighting is key to making everyone look good and sexy. No overhead lighting. "Votives are best, because you can set out lots of them and not have your party look like a séance," says Serena Bass, a Manhattan event planner and the proprietor of New York's Serena Bar & Lounge. "I like three groups of four votives on a big table, and then sets of four everywhere else." As for the table, you don't have to have flowers. Colin Cowie, the author of *Dinner After Dark* (Clarkson Potter), likes big bowls of eggplants and oranges—or coconuts, limes, and kiwis—as centerpieces. So does Nigella Lawson, though she favors a bowl of lemons solo. You can see over them, she points out, "and there's no scent to interfere with what you're eating."

10 Cede control. Pat Towers says dinner at her house often ends up being served a bit late, which can be a good thing for a party: "I am not very well organized, and so I have to keep disappearing into the kitchen. This forces everyone to get to know one another." •