



Délassant Dinner Parties

A new release offers sage advice for planning perfect gatherings

By Tam Sabaleski

Hosting dinner parties can be unnerving. A few years ago, *The New York Times* declared them all but dead, relics of another time, victims of cyber-socializing and hectic lives. It's a regrettable development that makes us less connected, and even poorer in spirit.

Hope comes in the form of a stunning new oversized hardcover book highlighting the cuisine of world-class chefs and the distinctive lodgings where they work. It inspires even a reticent host to draw up a guest list and get busy. Created for Relais & Châteaux North America by Rizzoli, ***The Art of Entertaining: Menus, Flowers, Table Settings and More for Memorable Celebrations*** features a variety of Relais & Châteaux inns of North America, the refined dining experiences offered at each place, recipes and much more. Eloquently written by Jessica Kerwin Jenkins, with magnificent photographs by Melanie Acevedo and David Englehardt, the book gives sage advice and savoureux recipes for your own soirées.

Among the meaty topics discussed here are how to carefully draw up a guest list, and how to transform an ordinary evening into something special with the addition of unexpected elements. The book also offers tips on how to create a welcoming atmosphere that energizes and piques anticipation among guests. Learn how to choose a theme—season, location, people's personalities—and decorate with that in mind. There's also advice for choosing linens, arranging candles and bouquets, and designing centerpieces.

The Art of Entertaining tells us that theme can dictate menu. From hors d'oeuvres that whet the appetite to savory desserts, each chef presents their specialties and describes the ingredients and techniques required to create the perfect culinary experience that will wow your guests. The gathering is a success, says Event Designer Matthew Robbins of the Glenmere Mansion in Chester, N.Y., when your "guests feel lost and immersed in the party."

A Mexican taco fiesta features chocolate clams and ginger margaritas. From a Montana trailside comes parmesan-dusted kale chips, caramelized parsnips and brussels sprouts with a hearty lamb stew. Learn how to host a leisurely Sunday brunch featuring shrimp and grits—"Southern comfort in a bowl"—with a palate-tingling tea 'tini cocktail from Planters Inn of Charleston, S.C. You'll also discover how to prepare a root beer-glazed pulled pork (the secret is in the rub).

You'll find tips on perfect pairings of wine and food from the Relais & Châteaux chefs who are honing their craft from the shores of Rhode Island to sunny Napa Valley and many other destinations. Nightcaps of brandy or scotch, and perhaps a cigar, may also have their place.

It all may sound daunting, but sharing preparation tips for succulent dishes and lip-loosening libations among friends can be delightful. The beauty of *The Art of Entertaining* is simplicity—a quality stressed by every chef. With forethought, planning, and limited steps designed to highlight food's natural flavors, you can host a *ravissante* affair and still enjoy the party. ■



Squash Risotto, Inn at Little Washington