

Getting ready to entertain

by Elisa Krovblit

The holidays are a great time to get together and celebrate. It's the one time of the year when families make a point of gathering together, friends make time in their hectic schedules to connect with each other, and celebrating and good tidings are in the air. It also means that at some point you'll probably have to entertain. As wonderful as it is to throw a great party and open your home to family and friends, this part of the holiday tradition is a major stress for many people. The way to go is to have a plan....



Chair-man Mills offers an amazing selection of rentals to add pizzazz to setting a table or serving a party. Call 416-391-0400 or look online at chairmanmills.com. You can check out all the available rental items and price list on the website, but it's worth a visit to the showroom where the rental possibilities are unbelievable.

1) Guest List:

- Be realistic. How many people can your home hold. Small space? Don't be shy, think buffet; use balcony space; condos have party rooms for just such an occasion, as do some apartments. Space heaters on patios add an extra room to homes and creates a perfect spot if you don't want smoking in the house.
- Dinner parties require more exact numbers, cocktail parties tend to have a looser protocol – people pop in for short periods; guests often bring a guest.

2) Drink List:

- Will you offer a selection of wine or a complete bar? Should you serve non-alcoholic beverages only? Is there something for the kids as well as adults?
- Advice from a professional can come in handy here. Michelle Hunt and Laura Panter, owners of The Martini Club, put together drink lists for parties as well as restaurants and bars. Michelle offers a few suggestions to help the party along. "Great drinks make for a great party. Create a drink menu," Michelle urges. "Have a selection of four or five. You can mix them by the pitcher." Michelle explains that this gets your guests trying something new instead of going for their boring old "default" drink. At The

Martini Club they often create fun, personalized drink menus or martini lists that include theme names. They've thrown 'Sex in the City' parties with Cosmopolitans and The Mister Big on the drink menu. They've also put together drink lists where the drinks are named after the hosts, their business, even their pets. The drinks are colourful, flavourful and have interesting garnishes. Guests often want to try them all. They also suggest keeping the alcohol content down so that you don't get your guests overly intoxicated – several three-oz. martinis may be too much to handle for many guests.

- For fun you might want to introduce a special alcohol. HPNOTIQ is all the rage among the stars. It's a very turquoise mix of triple-distilled vodka, cognac and tropical fruit juices, that looks great in a glass. Tequila is another popular one, and new on the market is Patron, a label being distributed by Dan Akroyd. Both are available at the LCBO.

3) Menu:

- Are you hiring a caterer or doing it yourself? Have you considered a potluck? It takes some of the pressure and expense off of you. Are children going to eat the same menu as the adults? Are you pairing your food to your wine/drink list?



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The Smirnoff Holiday Cruise

1 oz. Smirnoff Vodka
3 oz. Ocean Spray Ruby Red Grapefruit Juice
1/2 oz. Henkes Triple Sec
Shake and strain into a martini glass.
Garnish with 1/4 tsp. cloves and 1 tsp. frozen cranberries

-The Martini Club

Call The Martini Club at 416-778-9905
for more great entertaining ideas
Visit at 55 Mill St.
Building 9, Ste. 103

An easy shortcut is prepared hors d'oeuvres or take-away appetizers from restaurants. A sit-down dinner will require a lot more preparation, though even for a cocktail party there should be something for your guests to nibble on, balancing out alcohol consumption.

4) Decorations:

- Do you have a theme in mind? Flowers and candles are always a gorgeous touch. Traditional or unusual, think through the colours and the styles you want before you go to town on decorations. If you have a big tree, make sure it's not intruding on mingling guests. If you lack seating, rent some. And be careful where you hang the mistletoe!

5) Entertainment:

- Are you bringing in the band, entertainers or a DJ? Karaoke machines are inexpensive and fun for larger parties. Perhaps you want to load up the CDs or set a playlist on the computer. Music adds to the mood of any party.

6) Buying and Renting:

- Another list – make a checklist of everything you need. Try to be as thorough as possible, from napkins and extra toilet paper to groceries and streamers. Don't forget the ice. You will need a lot of ice. You may be fortunate enough to have everything you need, the caterers may be bringing some of the stuff with them, but a great alternative to disposables or big purchases of servingware that won't be a huge part of your repertoire is to rent them. Mary Crothers, president of Chair-man Mills, has some great suggestions for inexpensive and easy ways to take your party up a notch. "If you rent anything, rent glassware," advises Mary. They come by the

dozens in slotted boxes. Easy to handle, you can use fresh glasses without washing, and the rentals can be sent back dirty. Just fill the boxes back up. You can rent serving dishes of any size. Mary suggests picking coloured glass to add special flair, noting that even plain water makes an impression when it's served in a red fluted glass. You can rent almost anything, from fine china to funky sushi plates, tables, extra seating, festive tablecloths, flatware, silver or even top-of-the-line Riedel

crystal. Mary has some great suggestions for small budgets that will really make things festive without breaking your budget – they realize how costly big parties can be so don't be afraid to investigate.

"Here's to the days of good will, cold weather, and warm hearts!"

- A holiday toast from Dan Akroyd

- Mary also suggests using interesting items in unusual ways for decorations. Fill a glass bowl with water, add a few drops of food colouring and float some candles or flowers. It's quite easy and inexpensive with great effect. Shot glasses can line the centre of a table holding single stems. It also makes a bunch of flowers go a long way. Use picture frames as place cards for formal dinners, they make great little gifts for guests to take away when the evening's over. Don't be afraid to get crafty. A great tip – Chair-man Mills sells ice, pick up a few extra bags.

7) Itinerary:

- Delegate, delegate, delegate. There's a lot more to do as the party hour approaches. Make sure you plan for what needs to be picked up; ensure that someone is home to accept deliveries; and always count on a

guest to show up early. It takes serious coordination to get it all cooked and plated, especially if there are several courses. Putting labels on plates may make serving multiple dishes at different times go more smoothly. Make sure there's time for a last-minute game plan with the caterer and/or staff if you have help.

8) Overnight Guests:

- Out-of-towners and late-night revelers need a place to stay, prepare for it beforehand so that there's no scramble for pillows, bedding, taxi or hotel phone numbers when you're exhausted. You are legally responsible for guests that have become intoxicated at your home, so better collect some keys. Keep taxi phone numbers on hand and check for area hotels that are reasonably priced for guests that may need them. Many condominiums have guest suites. Find out how many are available, and offer them to guests when sending out the invitations.

9) Pre- and Post-Party Cleaning:

- There's a lot of cleaning to do and you always want your home to look its best when guests arrive. When they leave there will be another session of cleaning to do. Make sure extra supplies are on hand, think about hiring help if you can. Extra garbage, empty bottles and lots of left-overs are expected. Consider whether you're allowing guests to smoke in your home or designating an outdoor spot. You may want to put a big can in the smokers area as a safety measure – it also makes for easy clean up. **HD**



Sub Zero Martini

1 oz. HPNOTIQ
1 oz. Orange Rum
1 oz. Coconut Rum
Splash of Pineapple Juice
Garnish with mini sugar cube, stir sticks and rim martini glass with coconut.

-HPNOTIQ