

New Year, New Beginnings • Charming St. James

# Distinction

long island

DEC/JAN 2007 \$3.95



www.distinctionmagazine.com



# Pop the Cork

## IN STYLE

by Lyn Dobrin

Photography courtesy of Roses-n-Lollypops



Popping the corks of champagne bottles, kissing at midnight, singing “Auld Lang Syne,” making resolutions . . . New Year’s Eve can be all that and lots more. Event planners are skilled at turning an annual event into a memorable evening or a rousing party that lasts long after dawn lightens the sky.

But first you have to start with the people, says Christopher Robbins of Robbins Wolfe Eventeurs. “Every party comes down to the people who are attending it,” he says. His Manhattan-based company, which also has a full commercial kitchen in the Hamptons, runs the gamut of party planning ranging from an elegant dinner for two on Park Avenue to feeding 8,000 people

over the course of the Hampton Classic Horse Show, where Robbins Wolfe is the official caterer.

If you and your friends are all about food and wine, then a “Babette’s Feast” would be a perfect event, says Robbins, who would end the meal in a crescendo with a chocolate soufflé. At one Robbins Wolfe party, a casino night entertained a group of friends who enjoy gambling. But running a similar charity event for an organization where most of the people don’t gamble would be a disaster. “You have to think about the guest list and what will make the party work for the group as a whole,” he comments. “It’s about the experience that you’re all having together.”

A beautiful invitation is impor-

*Polar bears romp in an icy-cool setting created by event planners Roses-n-Lollypops. The winter-white and silver party scene warms to the flickering lights of a multitude of candles and the roaring fire in the hearth.*

tant, notes Michael Russo of Roses-n-Lollypops, based in Smithtown. “The invitation is the first impression of what the party is going to be, so you want to pick the perfect look and style,” he says. One of Russo’s favorite parties was billed as “Winter Meets the Spring,” and was held in a heated tent while snow was still on the ground. As the party got underway, the decor was an icy blue color; as the night progressed, everything gradually turned into warm summer colors through artful lighting and changing napkins and tableware





while guests were dancing in another room. The invitation, which arrived in a scroll box, contained snowflakes that were white and icy on one side and orange, yellow and pink on the other.

Russo finds that today people are abandoning traditional cocktail gatherings and doing more parties with themes, such as a Moroccan party where the entertainment included a belly dancer, henna tattoo artists, a contortionist and fire throwers. The invitation suggested that guests come in Moroccan attire (although it wasn't required). "If you put pressure on people, making them feel they have to dress to a theme, then they won't come or will feel uncomfortable the whole night," says Russo.

When it comes to theme parties, Tracey Gittere, president of Legendary

Events, Inc., has lots of ideas. Some families like to ring in the New Year together — adults and kids. For them Gittere suggests a pajama party. Families bring sleeping bags, pillows, interactive family games such as Junior Scrabble and bingo, plus arts-and-crafts supplies to make New Year's Eve hats. For couples, taking a cue from the popularity of TV's *Dancing with the Stars*, Gittere proposes a return to ballroom dancing.

Speaking of throwbacks, fondue has returned. Think about cheese fondue, beef fondue and chocolate fondue. Other must-have food and drink offerings, says Gittere, include shrimp cocktail, baked brie, chocolate-covered strawberries and crème brûlée. Whatever you serve, though, make sure there is plenty of everything.

Russo likes the idea of a New

*Event planner Michael Russo of Roses-n-Lollypops worked in a monochromatic color palette that emphasized yellow-greens for a holiday dinner party. The table covering, linens and chair covers were custom-made for the party. Fanciful accents include a centerpiece of green feather wreaths and sequined stockings hung from the mantel.*

Year's Eve wine tasting. "Get the favorite wine of each person who is there," he says, and during the evening people can talk about what they like about their wine.


Great entertainment adds sparkle to the party. Hire a band that will play the music you and your friends enjoy, suggests Robbins. "If you like music from the '70s, hire Gloria Gaynor or Donna Summer." Or consider hiring a good local band that specializes in the style of music you and your guests will enjoy.





*Dr. Seuss was an unseen guest at this holiday party. How the Grinch Stole Christmas was the host's favorite childhood book, so the mischievous character became the center of attention. A contemporary take on traditional holiday colors was the perfect foil for the whimsical decorations.*

And if doing a New Year's Eve party is not for you, think about a New Year's Day brunch, says Gittere, the sort you would find in a top hotel. Serve eggs Benedict, huevos rancheros, buttermilk pancakes, crepes, Creole potatoes, smoked salmon, and lots of champagne mimosas, bloody Marys and non-alcoholic fruit punch.

Of course, you can always take Christopher Robbins' advice and get everybody on a plane and fly to the place you all want to go. In that case, the sky, as they say, is the limit. 

*Lyn Dobrin enjoys writing about food, chefs, travel and gardens.*

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