

party prep IOI

Entertaining crowds
can be a daunting prospect –
take some tips from
the experts...

Sarah Paykel

Sarah Paykel knows how to throw a great party – in fact her business is renowned for its fashion and beauty industry events. She launched Sarah Paykel Ltd as a boutique communications company in 2003 and since then names such as Smashbox Cosmetics, Mi Piaci and Muse have featured on her client list. Sarah's background includes working at British Vogue and Chanel cosmetics and running her own business, Lush Cosmetics, in Australia, where she was inducted into the Australian Business Women's Hall of Fame.

Here are some of her golden rules when it comes to events:

- Handwritten invitations or email? A gorgeous, handwritten invitation is one of the loveliest things you can receive. Either way, let people know when to arrive and where to park.
- The guest list has to be right. That doesn't mean going for the obvious, i.e. everyone knows everyone else, but do choose people with shared interests. A new or interesting experience always leaves a good impression, so consider adding someone from outside the usual group.
- Think about introductions to break the ice and who will work well together. If you can, invite guests into your personal spaces, e.g. the kitchen. They can sip a glass of wine and relax while you continue cooking.

- It doesn't have to be a traditional sit down meal these days; you might want to invite people for just dessert and coffee, a cocktail party, or serve a tapas-style menu. Another option is to ask people to bring a plate – they often feel really flattered and it means you can put your energy into the company and ambience.
- Music is a key ingredient: do you want to create a party atmosphere or an intimate mood? We use a lot of compilations, like those from Café del Mar and Hotel Costes. Using an ipod also lets you personalise your choice and programme enough tracks for the whole evening.
- Think about the spaces in your home. Do you want to have pre-dinner drinks in one location then move to another? Consider where people will leave the items they bring with them, like coats and handbags, maybe even Christmas presents!





Sue Fleischl

Sue Fleischl's philosophy when it comes to food is to keep it 'fresh and simple', and that philosophy has served her well. The Great Catering Company, the business she founded in 1995, has grown steadily with each passing year and she now employs eight full-time chefs at her Auckland base. On the day she spoke to *Dish*, they were tackling eight lunches, a tasting for a wedding, and four evening functions – and that was just midweek. So who better to share some insider secrets on entertaining friends?

- If you are serving only one main is it something everyone will like? This is not the time to serve pigs' ears, because 90% of your guests will turn up their noses.
- Cocktail food needs that 'wow' factor so have fun, experiment with punchy flavours and consider eye appeal. Don't forget the odd simple dish though, like baby crepes stacked with cream cheese and smoked salmon. Allow five cocktail items per guest for a one-hour function, and eight for two hours.
- If it's a cocktail party, no-one wants to stand for more than two hours so think about having spaces to perch, especially for older people or pregnant women.
- Think about special dietary requirements like intolerances, allergies, pregnancy or religious beliefs. I think it's nice for the host to ask – after all, if you know there are 10 vegetarians you can provide a good selection of suitable food.
- Overestimate the time you need to prepare and don't be afraid to do things in advance. Maybe set the table the night before, or remember cakes can usually be made two or three days earlier, and if you are baking with pastry, pre-line the dish and freeze it up to a week beforehand.
- Make a list of what you need and be generous – this is not the time to scrimp. My kitchen walls are covered in blackboard and I write everything down – even the guests' names.
- Clearly defined invitations are important. People like to know whether they can expect dinner or finger food and they also appreciate knowing the dress code.
- Don't be afraid to ring people if they haven't RSVPd. You can't assume they are not coming because they haven't responded.
- Think about where you can store the dirty dishes out of sight so guests don't feel pressured to help you clean up.
- Make sure you have enough alcohol available. The formulas we use are as follows – Wine: four dozen white and two dozen red per 100 guests for two to three hours. Beer: two to four bottles per male. Bubbles: two glasses per person and more for weddings or big celebrations. And don't forget a selection of non-alcoholic drinks like juice.
- Remember lots of ice and lots of glasses. You'll always need more than you think!



Sue Fleischl

Photograph by Mark Heaslip



Lianne Whorwood

Lianne Whorwood

Stylist Lianne Whorwood spends her days rummaging through stores for the perfect pieces to complement the food shoots in *Dish*. As a props stylist for both food and home wares she has an eye for design. Here she shares her ideas for making a space special.

- Make name-place holders from natural items such as pebbles, leaves, or shells, or use unexpected items such as vintage wooden clothes pegs to hold name cards. Tuck or sit interesting berries, pods, buds or flower heads onto napkins at place settings.



- Use lengths of fabric (whether vibrantly coloured, or plain but beautifully textured) to make striking table runners.
- Pop basic white tea lights into unusual holders, such as a collection of differently shaped or coloured vases. I also go to Asian stores and buy paper lanterns and then hang those in trees with tea lights to create atmosphere. I also collect palm fronds once they've dropped from the tree. The base of the frond is a gorgeous deep brown husk which dries and hardens and can be used as a lantern. Simply turn it on its end, pop a jar with a tea light inside and set it in the garden – they give a gorgeous glow. (They're also perfect for serving fruit or breads and look stunning as part of a table display.)
- When entertaining outdoors scatter large cushions around for additional seating and to create a more relaxed feeling.
- Keep an eye out for interesting pieces at op-shops. A lot of things I use on my dinner tables I have sourced from second hand stores and op shops. One of my latest loves is 60s and 70s turned wooden bowls, usually unused wedding gifts! They are beautifully made and the wood is just gorgeous, I simply give them a clean and rub with olive oil to bring up the lustre. I mix these pieces in with my contemporary things – it gives warmth and life and I love the idea of something abandoned having a new use.
- Simple floral arrangements can be more effective than enormous bunches of flowers. Try running five or six differently shaped bottles down the middle of the table, each with a single stem, leaf, bud or branch in it.
- I don't believe in keeping things for best, every day is a special occasion. I much prefer that things are used and enjoyed, so pull out that good silver and dust off the cut crystal champagne glasses and enjoy them everyday! •

Main photo: Vases – Akali; plates – Country Road; napkins – Nest.

Detail shot: Cushion cover used as placemat – Acland Holdings; placemat – Republic Home; plate and coaster – Corso de Fiori; napkin – Chambers Linen; glass – Nest; vase – Akali.



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