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You've gotta love the Founding Fathers. Not only did the boys in wigs, stockings, and tricornered hats provide us with the perfect decorating scheme for every Fourth of July party—good ole red, white, and blue—but they ensured us the freedom to celebrate our nation's birthday in any way we choose. This year America is turning 227—not what you'd call old-country old, but grown-up and mature enough to warrant a slightly more sophisticated celebration, don't you think?

Alexandra and Eliot Angle certainly do. When the couple decided to host a Fourth of July party at their pad in Los Angeles's Echo Park, they knew they wanted a cookout by their pool with a dozen or so friends. But they weren't up for the traditional trappings of Independence Day. Not that they have anything against sparklers, stars-and-stripes bunting, or John Philip Sousa; it's just that the Angles, who started the interior design and event-planning firm Aqua Vitae Design, knew how odd over-the-top Americana would seem in their California-modern-meets-Asian-minimalist ranch house. "We're always really careful to match the party to the house," Eliot asserts. "If it's a modern space, the decor should be more minimal."

One look at the Angles' wide casement windows, sparse furniture, cinder-block walls, and bamboo grove will tell you that simple decoration was in order: Chinese lanterns, backlit bottles, and single-carnation arrangements. With a little advance work, the Angles needed just a few hours to ready their home and whip up their elegant cookout fare: grilled chicken skewers, shrimp ceviche cups, and jicama salad. "We're really big on easy," says Alexandra. "Choose someplace special, invite people you like, and just let it go from there."

Of course, when the Angles let a party go, it rarely ends up where you'd expect. While there's nary a sign of Old Glory in the midst of this chic celebration, the Angles used all red-white-and-blue decorations and kept it real with patriotically colored Popsicles and cupcakes, and Bud in bottles. That kind of surprising wrinkle has been the

two's calling card since they went into party planning three years ago—like the traditional wedding that took on a Moroccan theme or the tony town house extravaganza in which they had guests drinking from a punch-filled kiddie pool using six-foot straws. You could say the couple wrote the book on cocktail parties with a twist since, in fact, they did (called, of all things, *Cocktail Parties With a Twist*), and that landed them their own cable TV series. But just because the Angles have gone Hollywood doesn't mean they've gone Hollywood.

Planning an Indie Production

The Angles decided they wanted the decor to be distinctive, but they wanted to work with the patriotic palette's three colors. Pretty limiting, right? Not if you realize, as the Angles did, that it's all in how you use them. Just by hanging about 15 thematically tinted Chinese lanterns (which, though they cost as little as \$2.50 each, are eminently reusable) of differing sizes from the balcony at varying heights, the Angles added an understated yet festive touch. Then they set out cheap \$3-a-bunch carnations (yes, the much belittled bloom is good for more than boutonnières) in a variety of flea-market-bought china. Red carnies in a blue-and-white teapot, white and red in a blue vase—again, conventional Fourth of July colors presented in surprising ways.

Instead of using cliché Christmas lights or tired torchères, Eliot and Alexandra employed a variation on one of their favorite decorating touches: The couple gathered their empty wine bottles (as frequent hosts they always have a bunch), filled them with water, and added either red or blue food dye or, for white, a few drops of milk. Then they arranged the bottles beside the pool and along the buffet table, and backlit them with tea lights (\$3.95 for 100 at www.ikea.com) to give the occasion some affordable ambience.

Decor isn't the only thing they kept fresh. "We really believe in using seasonal ingredients for drinks and recipes," says Alexandra. "We focus on less and try to perfect it. Better to make one appetizer but make it great.

the menu

ruby slips

bottled beer

ceviche

cucumber cups

jicama,

tomato, and

corn salad

ginger-soy

chicken skewers

patriotic

popsicles

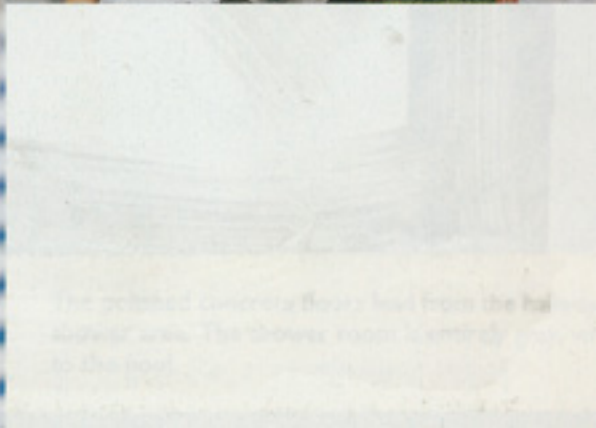
chocolate

cupcakes



a taste of freedom

Alexandra Angle (that's her with the lanterns, above) believes in offering fewer but fresher options. So the sole cocktail served is the Ruby Slip (well in hand, right), made with fresh raspberries. Those berries, along with lemons and blueberries, flavor the patriotic pops (below). Dinner is alfresco and farmer's-market fresh: a salad of jicama, summer tomatoes, and corn, and grilled ginger-soy chicken skewers (left).





red, white & new

Every year it comes and every year it's the same—sure, a Fourth of July party is about tradition, but what's more American than declaring your independence?

by LAURA CHAMORRO photographs by ERICKA McCONNELL



Drinking and diving may be a no-no, but sipping and swimming is all good at this July 4th party hosted by Eliot (far left) and Alexandra Angle. The patriotic red-white-and-blue decor is the icing on the cake—at least the cupcake (opposite)—at this event.

All grown-up doesn't
have to mean all
dressed up: Alexandra
(far left) and Eliot Angle
(center, in green)
let freedom and flip-flops
ring at their party.





show your colors There are more creative ways to display red, white, and blue than just flying a flag, like placing cost-efficient red and white carnations (\$3 a bunch) in mix-and-match blue flea market china (above). Basic Chinese lanterns (\$2.50 to \$8 each; www.pearlriver.com) take on an all-American look over the birdbath—the perfect perch for iced bottles of Bud (right). Tea lights placed behind wine bottles filled with red-, white-, and blue-colored water (made with a few drops of store-bought food coloring or milk) cast a warm glow remarkably like the dawn's early light.



Or serve one specialty drink instead of feeling you have to offer a full bar." For this celebration, that meant the party-planning pair opted for summery fruits and vegetables all around. In between bites of savory ginger-and-soy-marinated grilled chicken, guests noshed on jicama salad with cherry tomatoes and fresh mint, shrimp ceviche served in cups carved out of cucumbers, and a frozen cocktail the Angles created called a Ruby Slip, which is made with vodka, raspberries, and peaches. Instead of simply doctoring some Duncan Hines cupcakes, Alexandra made them from scratch and decorated them with red-white-and-blue stars and peace signs. Even the patriotic Popsicles, which could have easily gone the food-coloring route, got their hues from blueberries, raspberries, and lemons—not time-consuming projects, but ones you need to prepare for a little.

Amidst their planning, the couple planned on the unexpected, leaving a few of the final unfinished chores for

guests to do. "It makes them feel comfortable, like it's their party—which it is," says Alexandra. So when a few invitees showed up before the table was set or the drinks mixed, they were put to work. "It helped us out," she says, "and made them less embarrassed about being the first people to arrive."

When more of their friends rolled in, the hosts directed everybody down to the patio and bamboo-lined pool. "It's cozy down there, which gets everybody mingling," Eliot says. While some guests changed into bathing suits and splashed about, others nibbled and sipped Ruby Slips or Bud long necks, which were kept on ice in the birdbath.

By the time the sun (and the food and more than a few drinks) had gone down, everybody brought their cocktails upstairs to the Angles' deck to take in the to-die-for views of the Hollywood Hills, the Pacific Ocean, and once a year, the fireworks over Dodger Stadium. What could be more American than that?



o say can you see Everyone heads to the deck to watch the rockets' red glare (okay, fireworks) at the twilight's last gleaming (above). But no one missed the series of superb single options—the salad (right); the cocktail (below), Ruby Slips, the Angles' most intoxicating invention; the appetizer (left), shrimp ceviche cups—all laid out buffet-style for the taking. Think that's what the Founding Fathers meant by the pursuit of happiness?



ceviche cucumber cups (serves 12)

- 1-1½ pounds small shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ½ cup lime juice
- ½ cup white onion, finely chopped
- ½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ cup tomato sauce
- 1 tablespoon superfine sugar
- 2 tablespoons Mexican hot sauce (look for a brand with vinegar as the first ingredient)
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small ripe avocado, peeled, pitted, and chopped into small cubes
- Salt for seasoning
- 4 long European cucumbers

Bring one quart salted water to boil. Chop shrimp into small pieces and add to water. When shrimp is uniformly pink, strain and set aside in a large bowl. In a separate bowl, combine lime juice, onion, cilantro, tomato sauce, sugar, hot sauce, and olive oil, and pour over shrimp. Add avocado and stir to combine. Cover and refrigerate for one to two hours. When ready to serve, season with salt.

To make cups, peel cucumbers and cut into chunks an inch or so thick. Using a melon baller or a small spoon, scoop out the center of each chunk. Fill each cup with ceviche and serve.

slowly; these guys are delicate). Grill over a medium-high flame for about five minutes per side or until chicken is opaque throughout.

patriotic popsicles (makes 12)

- 2 cups water
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 1½ cups raspberries (or strawberries)
- 1¼ cups lemon juice
- 1½ cups blueberries
- ½ lime, juiced
- Popsicle containers or small paper cups
- Popsicle sticks

Combine water and sugar in a pot. Place over medium heat until sugar has dissolved. Remove from heat and let cool.

To make red stripe: Puree raspberries and strain to remove seeds. Combine with three-fourths cup lemon juice and two-thirds cup sugar water. Distribute evenly between Popsicle containers and freeze until set, about two hours.

To make white stripe: Add one-half cup lemon juice to two-thirds cup sugar water. Distribute evenly over raspberry layer. Freeze until set.

To make blue stripe: Puree blueberries in a food processor. Strain through a sieve over a bowl to remove seeds and skin, pushing mixture through wires with a rubber spatula if necessary. Mix blueberry juice with lime juice and the rest of the sugar water in bowl. Pour over lemon layer, insert Popsicle sticks, and put in the freezer until solid.

chocolate cupcakes (makes 12)

- 4 ounces unsweetened chocolate
- 1¼ cups milk
- 1 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed
- 3 egg yolks
- ½ cup sweet butter, softened
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1¼ cups cake flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 egg whites
- Icing:
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 tablespoon corn syrup
- 1 cup sifted confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon grated orange rind

Red and blue decorator's icing (available at supermarkets)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line muffin tins with paper baking cups.

In the top of a double boiler, over boiling water, heat chocolate, one-half cup milk, brown sugar, and one egg yolk. Whisk continuously and, when smooth and thick, remove from heat. In a separate large bowl, cream together butter and sugar. Add two egg yolks, three-fourths cup milk, and vanilla, and beat until smooth. In a separate bowl, sift together flour, baking soda, and salt. Slowly add to sugar and butter mixture and beat until smooth. Pour in chocolate mixture and combine. In a separate nonreactive (read: not metal) bowl, beat egg whites until stiff and fold gently into batter. Pour batter into muffin tins and bake for 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven and let rest for 10 minutes in tins. Then remove from tins and let cool completely on a wire rack.

Stir together cream cheese, corn syrup, confectioners' sugar, vanilla, and orange rind in a bowl, and use to frost cupcakes once they are cool. Embellish with red and blue decorator's icing as desired.

the ruby slip

To make the Angles' cocktail of choice, combine 2 ounces vodka, ½ ounce limoncello*, ½ cup raspberries, ½ peach, and ½ cup ice per drink in a blender and blend until smooth. Serve immediately. (*If you can't find limoncello, use a mixture of equal parts simple syrup and lemon juice.)

jicama, tomato, and corn salad (serves 12)

- 1 large jicama (or 4 cucumbers)
- 3 pints cherry tomatoes
- 3 corncobs
- ¼ cup fresh mint leaves
- 1 ounce tequila
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 10 tablespoons canola oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Peel jicama and slice into ice-cube-size chunks. Halve cherry tomatoes. Lightly steam corn for about five minutes. When done, run cobs under cold water and slice the kernels away using a sharp knife. Mix all those ingredients in a large bowl. For dressing, combine mint, tequila, lime juice, lemon juice, and oil in a blender, and puree. Add salt and pepper to taste. Dress salad just before serving.

ginger-soy chicken skewers (serves 12)

- 4½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 1 cup soy sauce
- ¾ cup white wine
- ½ cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 4 tablespoons canola oil
- 4 tablespoons sesame oil
- 2 eight-ounce cans whole water chestnuts

Skewers (if wooden, soak in water overnight before using)

Cut chicken into one-inch cubes. Combine all other ingredients except water chestnuts in a large bowl. Add chicken and toss to coat completely. Cover and refrigerate for at least one hour to marinate. Assemble skewers by alternating between pieces of chicken and water chestnuts (go