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THE BIG NIGHT

BY CHRISTY GROSZ PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY GARNICK STUDIOS



A woman in a black dress is smiling and holding a glass of champagne. In the background, a man in a tuxedo is visible through a doorway. The room is decorated for a party, with a table in the foreground set with a gold and brown patterned tablecloth, silverware, plates, and a centerpiece of roses and cupcakes. A framed menu is also visible on the table.

To help you celebrate the Academy Awards in high style in your home theater, two top-notch Los Angeles party designers have orchestrated elaborate menu lineups complete with drinks, desserts and decorations.



When movie fans allude to the Golden Age of Hollywood, they're not referring to the current millennium. For them, the Golden Age epitomizes a higher quality of film. To other film fans, it's an idyllic elegance exuded by the movies and the movie stars of the '40s and '50s. A time when actors, such as Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn, were inextricably linked with the enviable lives they portrayed on screen.

While Hollywood may have lost some of its sparkle through the years due to far too many print stories and TV shows detailing far too much about actors' private lives, there remains a single evening in which that undeniable mystique is resurrected: Oscar Night. From the sartorial delights of the red carpet to the mysterious envelope-bearers, the Academy Awards strikes a magical balance of intrigue and glamour. No other event brings together more of Hollywood's elite in a single room. Even those of us without assigned seats at the grand event want to experience the night vicariously, watching and waiting for the next gold statuette to be awarded.

To help you do just that, *Robb Report Home Entertainment & Design* handpicked two well-known Los Angeles party designers to show you how to throw a grand Oscar bash in your own home theater or media room. One plan allows you to relax like an Oscar winner, and the other is a nod to the old-fashioned cocktail parties of yesteryear. So gather together some friends, dress up, and roll out the red carpet to celebrate the 76th Annual Academy Awards, live from Hollywood's Kodak Theatre on Sunday, February 29.

The Showstopper

While a "you and your guest" invitation to a post-Oscar fête, such as *Liaison Fair's* elaborate annual party held at Morton's, will make you everyone's new best friend, nothing compares to being one of nearly 1,650 names on the exclusive guest list for the must-attend Governors Ball. And there's no need to climb back in the limo to get to this soirée—it takes place in the same entertainment complex as the Oscars, at the Kodak Theatre at Hollywood & Highland, and is hosted by the board of governors of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Since 1989, Sequoia Productions President Cheryl Cecchetto has been in charge of seeing that the select few who attend the Governors Ball—an enviable bunch including Academy members, movie studio



BIG NIGHT

continue all the way home. "When they leave, give guests a copy of your CD of nominated scores with the menu wrapped around it," she says. Or have another surprise waiting in their car—an Oscar or movie poster (visit www.oscars.com or eBay), a hangover kit, scented candles or a gold bag filled with champagne truffles.

Cecchetto has one final bit of advice for entertaining in your home theater. Once the party elements are in place, don't worry about everything unfolding perfectly. "Let the party take on its own life. Uncle Joe is going to get up on that table and dance," she says, laughing. "Let him have

1980s, classic cocktail parties are all the rage once again, according to party designers and authors Alexandra and Eliot Angle. In fact, it was the husband-and-wife team's experience in planning cocktail receptions in private homes that led to the publication of their first book, *Cocktail Parties With a Twist* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2002).

"When we moved to L.A., we decided to get back into the food and entertaining thing and started [event and interior design company] Aqua Vitae," says Alexandra, who was formally trained as a chef in Japan. "The real focus was on designing cocktail parties and creating drinks that use really

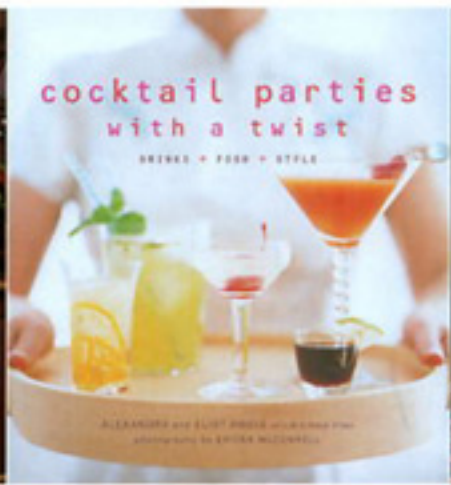
important to you instead of trying to do everything in an elaborate manner." And no matter how small the party is, sit down and make that to-do list, she advises.

"Something we stress is don't overthink things, don't overdo things; just do things that come naturally to you," Eliot says.

So how far in advance should you plan? "If you're going to send invitations, start planning two weeks in advance. That gives you a week of planning and a week to start putting the party together."

Always keeping the guests in mind is key. "As guests, people love to come into a home, primarily to see how someone [else]

AFTER DECORATING LIVING ROOMS FOR INTIMATE COCKTAIL RECEPTIONS THEY ORCHESTRATED, THE ANGLES WERE INVITED TO DESIGN FULL HOME INTERIORS.



fun doing it because he'll add another level that I'm sure you couldn't have planned."

And if you need further inspiration, do not fret—just log onto www.oscars.org to view this year's menu and décor highlights, as well as recipes and wine selections.

Sequoia Productions: 5504 Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City, Calif. 90230; 310.397.1477; catering by Wolfgang Puck Catering & Events, www.wolfgangpuck.com or 323.491.1250, 866.491.1250

Classic Comeback

The cocktail and Hollywood made a joint debut during Prohibition, which makes their pairing in the entertainment world a natural. It's no wonder that the assemblage of friends around a bar quickly became an essential film scene, giving characters a setting for letting go of their inhibitions.

Although convening specifically to consume finger foods and gesture with martini glasses fell out of favor in the 1970s and

fresh ingredients, [and] our knowledge as cooks to make incredible drinks."

The resulting tome is devoted to throwing parties for any occasion, in nearly any location—all centered around creative spirits and the chilled glass.

"The specialty cocktail has really taken off," Eliot says. "Most hosts really want signature drinks for an event—something you haven't seen before, which is interesting and fun." Recipes of this sort include the Ruby Slipper (vodka and raspberry), Green Tea Collins (vodka, green tea, lemon and fresh ginger) and Steamy Dream (rum, lemon juice and simple syrup flavored with cinnamon and ginger).

Their book, which *The New York Times* highlighted on the front page of its *Lifestyles* section in December 2002, focuses on entertaining at home with ease. Simplicity is the couple's formula for success, but no gala can succeed without some planning. "Keep it simple," Alexandra says. "Or focus on one or two areas that are

Alexandra and Eliot Angle, founders and owners of Aqua Vitae Design, and their popular how-to tome. The company name is Latin for "water of life" and is a nod to the 13th-century alchemist who discovered alcohol.

lives," Eliot continues. "That's something you can never lose sight of when planning an event in your home; you never want to make [the event] too grand or ornate because ultimately your guests just want to be a part of the experience."

The Oscar-party menu concept the Angles planned exclusively for *Robb Report Home Entertainment & Design* revolves around a return to the heyday of the cocktail party and the grand era of the Oscar.

"It's sort of an extended cocktail hour," Alexandra says. "We used old-fashioned foods like roast beef and stuffed eggs, but updated versions. Back in [the 1960s], they didn't take a ton of time to prepare food for their parties; they used a lot of stuff you

could get at your general grocery store."

To accommodate guests seated in a home theater, again the Angles drew upon the past for inspiration. "In the '50s when everyone played bridge, you'd put bite-sized food on your cocktail tray and take that to your seat," she says. "So we [used] long silver trays on which you could place three hors d'oeuvres, to put in front of you while you're watching the Oscars."

Despite the Angles' historical approach to this party, the idea of small bites is very much a trend in food today. "Tapas and cocktails are what people do, particularly in New York," Alexandra says. For their Oscar

the party. And it's not what makes the party," Alexandra explains. "What makes the party is, most importantly, relaxing and enjoying yourself—and helping all of your guests do the same."

This year's Academy Awards take place a month early, but the ceremony will no doubt run extremely long as usual. So get comfortable and don't fret about the next morning's cleanup until long after the Best Picture Oscar has been handed out.

Aqua Vitae Design: 2145 Park Drive, Los Angeles, Calif. 90026; 323.663.1777 or www.aquavitadedesign.com



Homeowner Dr. Michael Gurevitch and his wife, Lori, and daughter, Jacqui, plan to host their own Academy Awards get-together for friends in their new home theater.

party menu, she recommends cherry tomato with chèvre and tarragon hors d'oeuvres, roast beef tartlets, bliss potatoes with caviar and crème fraîche, and fancy chocolate cupcakes spiked with Cointreau. Their suggestions for decorations include using antique decanters as vases, as well as votives and mismatched cocktail glasses—anything reminiscent of the glamour of Old Hollywood.

Having planned ornate parties all over Los Angeles and New York City for everyday people and celebrities, the Angles admit there's no hard-and-fast formula for party-planning success. But they do offer a tip for novice hosts toying with the idea of entertaining in their home theaters. "People think having the perfect food, the perfect décor or the absolute perfect drink makes

C R E D I T S

Beverages: The Patron Spirits Company (800.723.4767)

Décor and styling: Sequoia Productions (310.397.1477)

Flowers: LA Premier Flowers and Events (310.276.4665)

Linens: Resource One (818.343.3451)

Rentals: Regal Rents (310.535.3660) and Unique Tabletop Rentals (800.709.7007)

Stationery design: Sequoia Productions (310.397.1477)

Photographed in the home theater of Dr. Michael Gurevitch; theater designed and installed by Bliss Enterprises of Agoura Hills, Calif. (818.706.2794 or www.blissenterprises.com)

Wolfgang Puck's Award-Winning Menu for the Night of the Golden Statue

Best Actor

Tray-Passed Vert Bellinis

(serves 12)

2 bottles of Nino Franco Prosecco

2 c. green-apple purée (available at gourmet stores)

½ c. Apple Pucker Schnapps

Fill champagne flutes halfway with bubbly; mix green-apple purée with Schnapps and top off each glass with purée-Schnapps mixture.

Best Supporting Actor

Miniature Burgers with Roquefort

(serves 12)

1 lb. quality ground beef

1 tsp. each salt and pepper

Brioche buns (see recipe below)

Herb stimoulade sauce (see recipe on page 123)

2 c. iceberg lettuce, shredded

8 cherry tomatoes, halved

16 gherkin pickle slices

4 oz. Roquefort blue cheese

Form small burgers, about 1 Tbsp. each, and season with salt and pepper; sear on grill. Halve buns and add a dab of herb stimoulade sauce, lettuce, tomato, pickle and cheese; top with more stimoulade.

Brioche Buns

3 Tbsp. self-rising flour

5 oz. plus ½ oz. fresh yeast

1½ eggs

½ c. milk

1 c. bread flour

½ tsp. salt

2 Tbsp. sugar

2 Tbsp. water

2 sticks butter

Egg wash

1 Tbsp. sesame seeds

Mix flour, 5 oz. yeast, 1 egg and milk to create sponge. Allow to rise in a covered bowl in a warm area.

Combine ½ oz. yeast, bread flour, salt and sugar in a mixer with a bread paddle; add to sponge-like mixture. Add water and remaining egg until thick. Add butter in small pieces until incorporated and transfer to larger bowl; cover and let rise in a warm area.

Punch down dough and break into four sections. Form small buns, 1 inch in diameter, and brush with egg wash; sprinkle with sesame seeds and bake at 375 degrees until golden brown, about six minutes.

(continued on page 126)