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How To Party Like an 'A-Lister'

By **CHRISTINA HAMLETT**
The Outlook

What's not to love about a great party? The decorations, the fabulous food, the signature drinks, the convivial company of good friends – from the viewpoint of the guests, it's a seamless tableau from the first arrival to the last hugs goodbye at the front door.

Parties, however, share an interesting kinship with Hollywood movies; specifically, appreciative audiences usually only see the final product and have absolutely no idea of all the behind-the-scenes trauma, drama, rehearsal and last-minute improvisations that go into making the whole thing look breezy and easy. Not surprisingly, the hostess who works so tirelessly to help everyone else relax is often the one most frazzled by party's end.

If throwing a holiday get-together is on your agenda this year, it's not too early to start taking a page of savvy advice from Pasadena native Marley Majcher, aka The Party Goddess! This intrepid event planner, author and international guest speaker is owner and CEO of a Los Angeles-based company whose A-list of celebrity clients includes Britney Spears, Pierce Brosnan and Snoop Dogg.

In addition to her start-to-finish production of star-studded events for the Critics' Choice Awards and the Hollywood Bowl, Majcher is the creative force behind full-service catering and the coordination of

elements such as photography, invitation design, headline entertainment, rentals, staffing, venues and logistics.

Prior to launching The Party Goddess! 11 years ago, Majcher was in the restaurant business, a career that not only gave her hands-on experience but also valuable insight and understanding of all of the moving parts necessary to orchestrate lasting memories. With an average of 40 events per year to organize from the ground up, she has no shortage of "been there/done that" entertainment tips to share with Outlook readers, including a story about one of her most challenging assignments.

"What tops my list was the party we did for Britney Spears and the sheer volume of people that we had to please," Majcher said. "First of all, it was logistically difficult because of where the house was. It couldn't be held at her house because of the paparazzi. It was a fairly short time frame, too, that was compounded by all the different schedules and agendas of the celebrities who were invited. On top of that, you're also trying to manage super-high expectations on the part of the personalities on the guest list."

By comparison, a housewarming party, an anniversary gathering or holiday cocktails in the suburbs may not carry similar pressures of global approval, but it's still incumbent upon the host to have a discernible theme and the discipline to stay within budget.



Marley Majcher

In Majcher's estimation, themes are critical to cohesion.

"A lot of times people hear the word 'theme' and they think it sounds like 'Superman' and immediately don't want any part of it. A theme, though, can be a color, a season, a movie, a time period. Picking a theme is important because it helps everyone to stay on the same page. Whether you're hiring a caterer or doing everything yourself, it gives a through-line to your event and enables your guests to 'get' what it is you're trying to do. If, for instance, you're going to plan something casual like a backyard barbecue, the dress code will be casual and your food and beverages should be casual as well instead of something that's complicated to eat or involves crystal champagne glasses."

She emphasizes the importance

of giving your party budget a serious reality check.

"Many times I'll get clients who want to do a ton of different things but they have a smaller budget that's not really going to accommodate that dream. There are lots of suggestions I make insofar as downscaling their costs. For instance, think about doing things on an 'off' day. The most popular days ever for parties are always the Saturdays in December. You can throw just as great an event, however, on a Friday or Sunday night or even a brunch. By simply mixing up the day — especially if you're holding your party somewhere other than at home — the expenses will potentially be a lot less."

She also recommends "owning a holiday" as a way to distinguish yourself with your guests. "Pick a day that you love to entertain and become known to your family and friends as the place to be every year that holiday comes around. My mom once told me that the best parties around are the ones on New Year's Day. The reason is that no one really has anywhere to go after all the carousing they did at parties the evening before. There's so much hype about New Year's Eve but how many times does it turn out to be a letdown? On New Year's Day, there's not much to do, you probably don't have to go to work and it would just be weird to invite a friend over to do nothing with you. If you choose a holiday that you subsequently become known for, you don't become mixed in and lost in the shuffle of the traditional parties that everyone else is hosting."

If you're looking to minimize your decorating costs, Majcher suggests concentrating the action in specific parts of your house.

"Focus your resources on the areas where your guests will be congregating since this will reinforce your theme and give you more bang for the buck." Incorporating elements that can perform double-duty can save money as well. "A martini luge, for instance, is a great example of this because you use it functionally to serve drinks, it looks like a great décor item, and it also acts as entertainment. Even if you're not having a martini, you're still fascinated by watching it in action." Another idea that is popular with her clients are edible centerpieces. "Consider, for instance, doing a centerpiece of sweets or — if it's a fall motif — caramel-dipped apples. Use party favors and gifts as part of their place-card."

As far as beverages go, Majcher believes that the No. 1 way to go to reduce your bar bill is to have signature cocktails.

"People make the mistake of thinking they have to have a full bar. If you have signature cocktails, though, no one thinks that you're cheap, it looks like a lot of thought went into it, and you don't have to have multiple varieties of mixers and alcohol. Instead, you offer beer, wine and two amazingly unique

drinks that you think your crowd would like."

For brunches, she suggests having a Bloody Mary bar with all the works. "It gets people talking and interacting as well as customizing their beverages. This takes a load off the hostess, too, because if a guest arrives who doesn't know anyone or whose spouse isn't there yet, they can gravitate over to where something fun is happening and make some new friends."

With so many events to organize every year, she taps her passion for globetrekking as a way to seek out innovative ideas and never throw the same party twice.

"Every time I travel, I come away with observations about how people do things and the resources they use. I recently came back from Alaska, for instance, and — given their bounty of fresh salmon — I realized what a great party idea it would be to feature a salmon tasting bar where people could try it grilled, cured, poached and with an array of exciting garnishes."

She also gets a lot of ideas from nature about color combinations, lighting techniques and innovative ways to present food. "By visiting parts of the world and other cultures that aren't as wealthy as the United States, you pick up tips and tricks for entertaining that don't involve million-dollar floral arrangements and elaborate lighting systems."

Last but not least, even a pro like Majcher isn't immune to the age-old dilemma of guests that don't bother to RSVP.

"Isn't that just the rudest thing?!" she declares. "You obviously have to have a head-count so you'll know how much food to serve but so many people treat it casually or assume that the host is a mind-reader and knows everyone's agenda. I'd really like to be able to just bounce them myself at the front door but, unfortunately, that could create a real buzz-kill. Although I've yet to find the perfect solution, it helps to put a response date on your invitation that is much earlier than you actually need it. This then gives you enough time to follow up with a phone call to the ones who haven't responded."

It's also smart, she says, to have two ways for guests to RSVP. "One is a phone number and the other is via email. While it's no excuse, sometimes people are traveling or they're looking for the right time to make a phone call and then they end up forgetting about it altogether. When all else fails, you sometimes just have to make an educated guess about the guests you haven't been able to reach and adjust your food and beverage plan accordingly."

It's never too early to start thinking about those holiday events, she advises.

"I invite my fellow Outlook readers to visit our website (www.thepartygoddess.com) or give us a call at (323) 222-8376 and even begin planning your event online," Majcher said.

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