

DESIGN FOR THE WELL-LIVED LIFE

HOUSE & GARDEN

JULY 2006

Entertaining
with Style—
and Soul

The Best
TEQUILAS, HOSTESS GIFTS
& NEW ORLEANS CUISINE
DECORATING: THE NEW
SORBET COLORS

At the Table

DOMESTIC BLISS

ANATOMY OF A PERFECT NIGHT

DESIGNER AND ANTIQUES MAVEN NATHAN TURNER GUIDES US THROUGH ONE OF HIS RECENT FETES AND DISSECTS THE ART OF THROWING A PARTY



Residents of Los Angeles pride themselves on throwing good parties, but even in a can-you-top-this town, Nathan Turner's soirees are legendary. For this antiques dealer and designer, atmosphere is the key to a fine affair. Inspired by the sights and tastes he has experienced in the lands he visits on buying forays, Turner has transformed his retail space on North Almont Drive into a simulacrum of such places as Argentina, Spain, and Istanbul. We asked him to list the ingredients that make a party unforgettable.

1 PUT IT IN WRITING

"I'm a huge fan of invitations. It's an opportunity to show the guest a little of what's to come. If it's last minute, I call or e-mail and follow up by mail. It shows you are putting energy into the event, making it a more enticing party to attend."

2 CHOOSE A THEME

"I start with the food and work a theme and colors from there. Paella once inspired a red-and-black Spanish theme. Be careful not to get too kitschy."

A trip to Turkey with Soledad and Alessandro Twombly was the catalyst for an exotic "L.A. Meets Istanbul" party at Turner's store, which he decorated with gauzy tenting, paper lanterns, and fabrics and accessories in jewel tones.

At the Table

3 KEEP IT SIMPLE

"I like to match everything to the theme, but if you're not addicted to buying plates as I am, buy a really simple pattern or even plain white, so you can easily add other pieces that fit your theme. Never use plastic. Even on the beach, I use proper cutlery and fun metal dishes."

4 USE WHAT YOU HAVE

"Materials you already own can be creative solutions. I used a set of red tumblers as wineglasses for my Spanish paella party and as vases for another."

5 MAKE A SEATING CHART

"Social engineering makes a party. Think about commonalities between people, and disperse livelier guests to prevent having a 'fun' side of the table and a 'boring' side; or use round tables, which foster group conversation."

6 MIX IT UP

"Don't be afraid to use unmatched table settings. Mixing up a table makes guests feel at home and ready to eat. I always mix my black transferware with other china, and I use my large collection of hotel silver, which looks great with everything else I have."

7 USE THE WEB

"For unusual items, I do a Google search for whatever my theme is. It always gives me more ideas and leads me to great online stores."

8 KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

"I'm a great cook, but I'm hopeless with flowers. If I have time, I have someone do them, or else use one type of flower, lots of them, tightly arranged in vases."



A superb cook, Turner, above, installed a kitchen in his shop. ■ His settings, top, often include exotic touches like Italian glass or Moroccan tile for a table covering. ■ Shimmer floor tile by Zillij, \$85 a sq. ft., at Imports from Marrakesh. In NYC, 212-675-9700. ■ Arte Italia's Cranberry tumbler, \$124 for a set of four, from Horchow. horchow.com.



9 LET THEM LOUNGE

"When I want to incorporate the outdoors, I set the bar up outside and create a lounge area with carpets and a few pieces of furniture where people can hang out before dinner."

10 MAKE A PUNCH

"Rather than stock an expansive bar, make one specialty drink and let guests serve themselves: sangria, margaritas, or champagne punch do nicely."

11 KEEP IT CASUAL

"Self-service works best, even for formal events, and especially with dessert. My favorite dessert is a huge platter piled with cheeses, fruit, and melted chocolate, with a cup of skewers on hand

so people can dig in and help themselves."

12 CHEAT SELECTIVELY

"Don't try to do it all, I have a system: 30 guests and under, I do the food myself; more than that, I call a caterer. Or I'll cheat and make the main course and order the sides. On

the other hand, I make it a rule to cook one thing myself, even if it's just the dessert."

13 SPLURGE ON FOOD AND FLOWERS

"You can't fake those things. You can always make do with everything else: sew a hem on inexpensive fabric to make tablecloths, or borrow a few items from friends."

14 RELAX

"Be in a good mood and spend time with everyone. Be happy you're entertaining. There's nothing worse than a party where the host is stressed and frantic."

