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& GARDEN<sup>®</sup>

May 2004

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issue

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**Minnesota**  
Monthly

openhouse



Sake Martini recipe by Fuji-Ya  
Sushi provided by Simply Sushi



# party on

From restaurant fare to signature drinks, home entertaining is more inventive and fun than ever

BY ALICIA L. CONROY  
STYLED BY LIBBY FRANSEN  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAKI STRUNC PHOTOGRAPHY



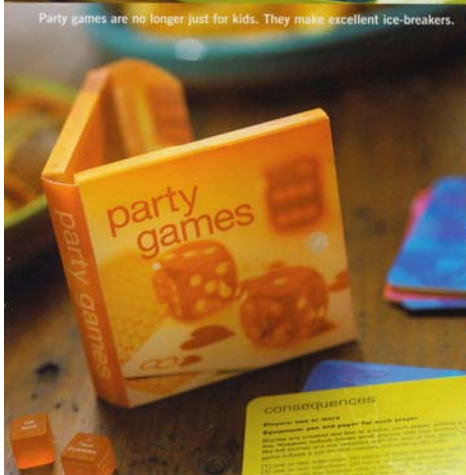
Kaliki recipe by Psycho Suzi's Motor Lounge  
Festive, tropical-inspired appetizers provided by Apples Catering

FOR SIGNATURE DRINK  
RECIPES, PLEASE TURN  
TO PAGE 68.

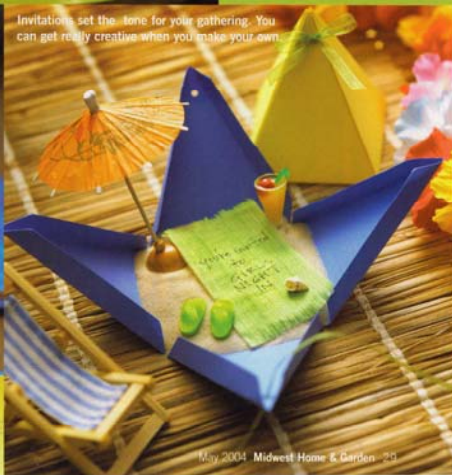
Hosts can do as much work—or as little—as they choose. Some may elect to have an event catered by a restaurant like Mojito or a caterer like Apples Catering. Others may want to make the entire menu themselves and yet others may split the difference. Simply Sushi delivers to your home all the sushi-making ingredients—including the rice—ready for assembly.



Mojito recipe by Mojito  
Seafood Moquecha and Empanadas With Smoked Paprika and Tomato Jam provided by Mojito



Party games are no longer just for kids. They make excellent ice-breakers.



Invitations set the tone for your gathering. You can get really creative when you make your own.

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Across the Midwest, people are throwing open windows and letting in fresh air—to their entertaining styles, that is. Home entertaining is more varied, adventurous, and popular than ever—and the heartland is catching up with the trend-conscious coasts. From home-based fundraisers to showers-with-a-twist, over-the-top birthday bashes to *Friends* finale soirées, it seems that any creative excuse for a party is a good one. And why not? There are more resources for planning, decorating, and menu selection than ever before, enabling hosts to do as much or as little work as they please.

Theme-based parties are a huge trend now, says Geri Wolf, proprietor of the Style Laboratory in uptown Minneapolis, a one-stop shop offering inventive goods and services for entertaining. On the coasts, she says, parties based on TV shows or movies, such as *Sopranos* dinners, are hot.

Sophisticated bridal showers are *de rigueur* as more and more women are marrying at an older age. "They're much more cosmopolitan or diva-based—and I don't mean that in

a bad way," says Wolf. Put away the Jordan almonds and tea cakes, ladies. Instead, serve a signature drink, a growing trend that helps anchor the menu and décor, Wolf says. Bars or restaurants occasionally will share a popular recipe, she adds. Try a "Girl's Night In" shower and serve Manhattanesque decorations and spicy games, à la *Sex in the City*, and sushi with sake martinis.

Wolf believes people are more educated and confident about food and wine than a decade ago, which leads to creative entertaining. "People are really wanting to experiment," she says. In the Midwest, hosts are becoming more comfortable with using party planners, personal chefs, wine advisers and rental services to do some or all of the preparation—it doesn't have to be all or nothing. "Don't assume your party or budget is too small for a caterer," she advises. Or ask a favorite restaurant to help plan a menu and prepare food. Many restaurants will cater events even if they don't advertise the service, she says, and will expand beyond their menu listings. Party planners such as Wolf have many

# openhouse

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

resources at their fingertips, from where to go to rent palms and torches for a luau to which caterer is best suited to prepare a French-Asian fusion anniversary feast.

On the flip side, many hosts enjoy cooking or handcrafting invitations or party favors. The Style Laboratory caters—pardon the pun—to both types, offering vendor referrals and event planning, some free services, and creative table-top goods, stationery, and do-it-yourself materials. What's more, it has an "R & D room" that seats 18, with a die-cutting machine, sticker-makers, punches, and other equipment that groups can use to make invitations, scrapbook pages, or festive containers. Wolf says some brides have invitation-making parties and provide wine and appetizers for friends. Also, hosts can try stores whose stock relates to the party theme, such as Mexican *mercados* for Cinco de Mayo.

Wolf gives a quick checklist for party planning and delegating duties. First, consider the occasion or party theme, and then the type and number of guests. "Use home entertaining as an opportunity to introduce different groups of friends," such as longtime locals and recent transplants, she suggests. Next, set a budget and plan the menu. A budget should include food and drink, invitations, décor, entertainment, and outside services such as event planning or bartending. Choose beverages that complement the menu. Invitations should indicate the tone and formality of the event, while creative props, decorations, and entertainment will help carry through the theme. The priceless to-do list clarifies tasks so hosts can decide what to do themselves and what to hire out. Plan one or two activities as ice-breakers, and finally, Wolf advises, "once the party begins, let go and have fun." ■

Alicia L. Conroy lives and writes in Minneapolis.

FOR DRINK RECIPES, PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 64.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 152.



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