



Friends and Family First

In the end, it's really all about people

A great dinner partner is somebody who is really "present." I go to a lot of dinner parties and when the person I'm seated next to is really "there," it makes the evening special. A great dinner partner is also interesting, introspective, fun and clearly enjoying life—someone who is living in the moment. Some people live in the past, some people live in the future. I live in the present. It's just the way I am, and when you're that way, it helps draw people into the best dinner conversations.

The best way to draw someone out is to ask about their children, their animals, a passion or a hobby—something personal—not just to talk about the weather. I don't like to have purely social conversations or conversations about the stock market. Yes, people like to talk a little bit about where they're traveling or what they're doing, but the dinner partners I've talked with in a personal, intimate way are the ones who have been the most meaningful to me. It's about getting something real out of your dinner partner and also giving something real back. That's what makes a great evening in the end. +

ALEX PAPACHRISTIDIS' TIPS FOR THROWING A PARTY

1. I know everyone loves a seated dinner, but I love a buffet where people can sit wherever they want. That way it's easy if people bring houseguests or if someone drops out at the last minute.
2. Never use rented dishes, flatware or linens. If you don't have enough, I much prefer mixing different sets of china and silverware instead. I like to combine both antique and new serving pieces. Antique Chinese export blue-and-white platters work well with Mottahedeh Canton blue-and-white oversize casseroles.
3. Simple, straightforward homey menus work better than over-fussed food. And I always give my guests a choice of entrees.

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SOME OF MY GREAT DINNER PARTNERS

- Dominique Browning at George Farber's 49th birthday dinner at The Modern.
- Pruzsina Krefin and Laura Slatkin at Harry and Laura Slatkin's party celebrating my birthday at their townhouse.
- Beth Rudin DeWoody and Ophelia Rudin at Bill Rudin's birthday party.
- Harold Koike at Alison Mazzola's birthday party at Swifty's.
- Rena Senti at a dinner her parents gave in her honor in the South of France.
- Gayfrid Steinberg and Laura Broumand at David Moran's dinner in SoHo.
- Jill Dierd at the President's Preview and dinner for the opening of the 2008 Kiss My Seat Show House.
- Bruce Boalt at Eli's.

4. You need one waiter for every 10 people.
5. Try not to use the same china and table settings for the same guests in the same year. I collect antique china and silverware wherever I shop. I like a mix of high and low on the same table—for instance, mixing inexpensive bella tablecloths with sterling silver artichoke peppermills from Muraglia in Venice.
6. It is very important to have a mix of younger and older guests. The spirit and energy young people bring to a party add to the magic.
7. Always leave the wine choice up to an expert—one cannot do everything well. In my family, my partner Scott Nelson chooses the wine for every family function, party or dinner.
8. I don't believe in entertainment or a live band, but I do like to have a DJ—Tom Flier's my favorite.
9. I never entertain without my close friends and family in attendance. For me, these are the people who really make a party fun and memorable.