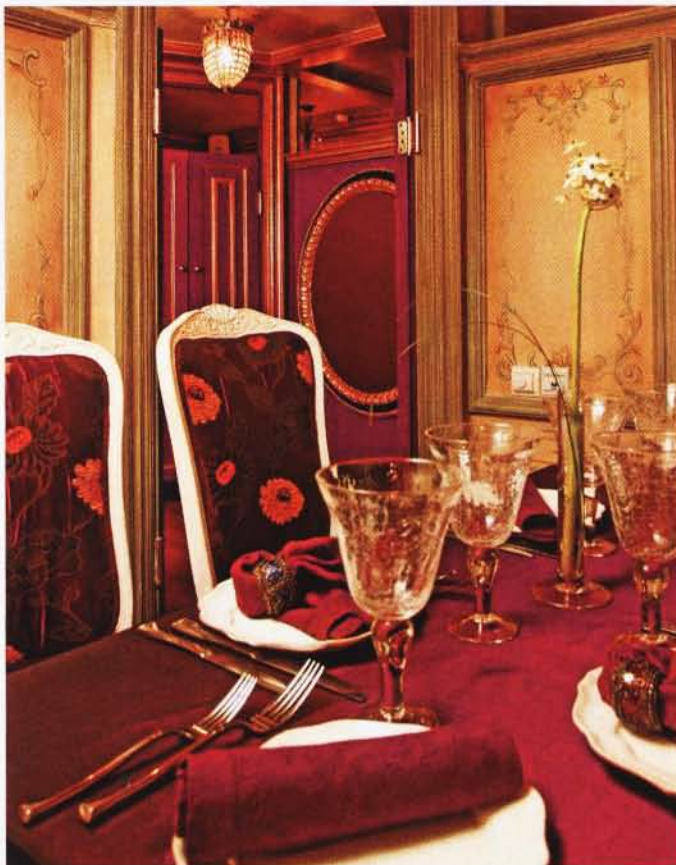


LEAVE PARTY PLANNING TO THE PROS

By *Emiliana Sandoval*

Who doesn't love a great party?

It's even better when the decorating, cooking, bartending and cleanup are done for you, so all you and your guests have to do is relax and enjoy. If you want to host the perfect holiday party, shower, wedding reception or surprise birthday bash, metro Detroit offers a wealth of venues.



Historic locations, such as The Henry Ford, Meadow Brook Hall, the Colony Club and The Westin Book Cadillac Detroit, are great places for a party, says Candice Vallone, owner of Metro Luxe Events Candice Vallone. She's especially excited about the Detroit Institute of Arts, which now can be booked for private events.

"It's unbelievable. The rooms they're allowing you to use are astoundingly beautiful and make such a great backdrop," Vallone says. "The DIA has that wow factor, and you can look at artifacts from all over the world. It really makes an impression on your guests."

Vallone collaborates with several country clubs that are open to nonmembers for parties.

"Food is such an important part of an event, and some of the country club chefs are top-notch," she says. "The Tam-O-Shanter Country Club in West Bloomfield has a beautiful ballroom and a smaller formal gourmet dining room with an elaborate fireplace." She also likes planning events at the Oakland Hills, Franklin and Birmingham country clubs.

Larry Guitar, the owner of Special Events Rental in Warren, has worked with venues all over Michigan. He keeps a list of 60 locations on hand for his clients, and some of his favorites are edgier, less obvious picks, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, the Fisher Building concourse and Flat 151, all in or near

downtown Detroit.

"Flat 151 is a big, giant loft studio near Cobo with great views. It's a blank slate – you can do anything there," Guitar says. "And the Russell Industrial Center would be a great place to have a roller-skating party."

Banquet halls are an easy choice for gatherings small and large. Most halls can customize everything as you like it, from décor to food and music. At Lakeland Manor in St. Clair Shores, each event menu is custom-designed to fit the host's culinary preferences.

"We make everything from scratch," says Catering Director Kelly Engel. "Last summer, we did a clambake garden party. Everything was New England-themed: linens, décor, flowers. We had the seafood flown in fresh and designed cocktails around the menu. Anything you can think of, we can do."

For something wilder, look into the Detroit Zoo, where you and your guests can enjoy a catered picnic on the spacious grounds, party with the polar bears and seals in the Arctic Ring of Life, or celebrate in the indoor rainforest at Amphibiville, home of the National Amphibian Conservation Center.

Or host your soirée in the Wildlife Interpretive Gallery, available year-round with access to the Butterfly-Hummingbird Garden. Not only will your party be memorable, but you'll also be supporting one of Detroit's most beloved institutions. □