



THE PERFECT BRIDESMAIDS' LUNCHEON

Two wedding planners show how to have fun creating an unforgettable day for your best friends—with emergency ideas for inclement weather

STORY BY JANE GRAU | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS EDWARDS

They shared your cabin at summer camp. You braided each other's hair on sleepovers. They teamed up with you in intramurals to beat the champions and joined the same sorority in college. And now they're standing up for you at your wedding to the adorable guy who supplanted them as your best friend.

So to show them how grateful you are for all they're doing to make your big day the happiest of your life, you're planning a bridesmaids' luncheon they'll always remember.

A great party is a gift like any other, one that you plan with care to be meaningful for all, one that will become a treasured memory. The more unique the details—and a memorable party has many—the more planning it takes. If you're using a wedding consultant, you can turn to her for help. An experienced coordinator provides valuable resources you might not have access to and the assurance that both the planning phase and the actual event run as smoothly as possible. But if you're planning your own party, you'll find plenty of fun ideas in our story.



Above right, bride-to-be Kelly Cannon enjoys a green-apple martini with friends. Opposite page, clockwise starting from upper left: Details are essential when planning a party; the luncheon (planned by wedding consultants Sikky Rogers and Angela Gala) has a pocketbook motif that begins with an invitation from The Buttercup. A close-up of the handmade sugar flowers on the party cake (shaped like a pocketbook) shows the masterful work of cake maker Kathy Allen. Hand-lettered place cards were created by the mother-daughter calligraphy studio, Lyncrist. One-of-a-kind pocketbooks were made by Laura Sutthoff of ARTstyles as gifts for the bridesmaids. For further information, see the Resource Guide, page 84.



Above, wedding planners Angela Gala (left) and Sikky Rogers combined their creative talents for the luncheon. Top, a picture of Southern elegance, the dining room is flush with pink and green (the bride's colors), including flowers by Elizabeth House.

Last month, Sikky Rogers, who has orchestrated Charlotte weddings for over a decade, and Angela Gala, also a wedding planner, put together a beautiful bridesmaids' luncheon for bride-to-be Kelly Cannon. Rogers—whose easygoing manner, cool head, and Southern style have endeared her to clients as a family friend (if she isn't one already)—is assisting with Cannon's wedding this summer. The luncheon, held in a private Myers Park home, was a confection of pink, white, and green, the colors of the wedding.

Rogers and Gala got started with some help from Cannon's mother, Ginny Cannon, who suggested they use the wedding colors. With so many pieces to pull together—date and time, setting, invitations, cake and flowers, menu, presents, and favors—it can be hard to know where to begin looking for an idea. But finding a thematic thread to direct the many decisions that arise will, in the end, give a party a sense of polish and completeness. With Cannon's bridesmaids wearing strapless gowns of a celadon plaid and carrying bouquets in shades of pink, her pretty colors became a source of inspiration for the luncheon. The dining room, with its minty wallpaper and green-and-white moiré fabric, became the perfect setting. The bridesmaids'

gifts—hand-painted, beaded purses by Laura Sutthoff of ARTstyles—formed a whimsical, feminine motif for the gathering.

Using these two ideas, a delightful event began to unfold in their imaginations, one that carried the theme from beginning to end, influencing the flowers, table setting, and even the menu.

Since a guest's first impression about an upcoming event starts with the invitation, the wedding planners selected something that would build anticipation.

"The invitations should give a hint of what's to come," explains Gala. When she found envelopes shaped like pink handbags at The Buttercup, she hand-colored the white cutout flowers a light green in keeping with their theme. "If you can't find exactly what you want," she says, "use your imagination. Find something close and alter it to your liking." Experienced wedding planners are confident with their sense of style and panache, but you can easily follow their lead by putting fun first and fears second. Gala advises to play up a fantasy aspect

Above, menu cards raised expectations for the delicacies to follow. Each place setting has a tiny bouquet in an unexpected container, including a silver baby cup, a sugar bowl, a perfume bottle, and an ink well. Right, a silver basket was one of three antique silver containers used for the centerpiece.



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of your affair to create an experience for your friends unlike any they've ever had.

When the big day arrived, a dismal forecast had Rogers and Gala scrambling for a way to carry out their original plan to kickoff the party in the secret garden. Ever the optimist, Gala's thoughts turned to umbrellas—pink and green ones, to be exact. A rash of phone calls turned up lime-green umbrellas at Wal-Mart and with some quick improvisation and a great sense of humor (plus yards of pink ribbon), the planners had guests ready for a garden party.

Gala and Rogers have found that having an artist available to do caricatures during the early stages of a party is a merry way to get things off to a good start. The sketches become one-of-a-kind favors, stir up laughter and conversation, and cause

Above, tiny deviled quail eggs were served as appetizers. Right and below, Robert Broom braves the light drizzle and serves green-apple martinis (right) and summer cucumber sandwiches (below).



each friend to feel special. So while an artist made quick sketches (to be slipped into pink parchment envelopes tied with green satin ribbon afterward), the women enjoyed a host of light appetizers in the courtyard garden. Porcupine Provisions—a favorite caterer for the two planners—prepared the entire menu. Hors d'oeuvres included tiny deviled quail eggs and delicate cucumber sandwiches accompanied by green-apple martinis.

When the first course was ready to be served, guests were called into the dining room where the effect was breathtaking. A splendid round table was set with green-and-white Herend china on white Battenburg lace place mats. Menu cards, handwritten place cards with scrolling calligraphy, gleaming Louis XIV sterling silver, emerald cut crystal, and masses of flowers created a spectacular presentation.



Antique silver containers were filled to overflowing with lush ranunculuses, sweet peas, peonies, Lenten roses, and white lilacs. On the English sideboard, two regal urns flanked a fabulous cake composed of a pastel-green dome topped with a pocketbook. Everything—from the pocketbook's glittering clasp to its flower-bedecked border—was edible. Cake maker Kathy Allen of Cakes of Distinction created a tour de force of the baker's art, fashioning realistic roses and lilies of gum paste (a petal at a time), pressing fondant into a lace mold to create the look of lace fabric on the bag, and using edible gold powder to add a double-take sparkle.

One secret experienced party planners have for making a striking impression is to use the unexpected. Rogers took an antique silver vegetable dish, basket, and tea caddy to floral designers David Williams and Mark Rupard at Elizabeth House Flowers. Knowing the bride's colors, the designers filled the containers to create a sensational grouping in

Left, the threat of showers didn't hinder the creativity of the wedding planners, who made quick calls to area stores and found lime-green umbrellas, to which they tied sassy pink ribbons. Everyone stayed dry. Below, friends toast the bride-to-be (center).





Above, chef Bruce Schlernitzauer of Porcupine Provisions adds the finishing touches to Butter Braised Lobster Tails on Polenta with Herb Salad (detail below left). Left, cheese straws accompany the Spring Pea Soup with Minted Crème Fraîche.

the middle of the dining table. They also made miniature bouquets to personalize each guest's place, but again placed flowers in unexpected vases selected by Rogers: a silver baby cup, a cut-crystal perfume bottle, an inkwell, and even a sugar bowl. You can translate the idea to your own party, using a collection of favorite objects or even things drawn from the friendships and history of your guests. Each thoughtful gesture contributes toward an event your friends will treasure. "You have to think things through thoroughly, from start to finish," Gala says, "to leave guests feeling satisfied."

A spring pea soup (green, of course) was served with minted crème fraîche, accompanied by the best cheese straws in memory, everyone attested. This was followed by the main course: a savory cake of polenta topped with a butter-braised pink lobster tail, skewered to form a tight ball. In the heart of the lobster curl, Chef Bruce Schlernitzauer tucked spring greens then scattered tiny lavender flowers from chives over the salad. The fragrant meal was melt-in-your-mouth delicious. "He's the best," Rogers sighed.


Before having dessert, each friend was invited to pull a ribbon hanging from the base of the cake. The ribbons led to silver charms hidden inside, each with a symbolic meaning. Ooohs and aaahs followed each friend's surprise, generating laughter while



Left, Erin Allen pulls a ribbon from the cake to find her silver charm. Above, the stunning pocketbook cake by Kathy Allen is completely handmade and entirely edible, from the flowers of gum paste to the glittering clasp and handle painted with edible gold dust mixed with vodka. Far left, everyone found room for a slice of the delicious almond-flavored cake.



Above, Amy Erb shows off a beaded-handle, hand-painted pocketbook. Above left, attending the luncheon were (clockwise from Kelly Cannon in white at left) Mindy McBrayer, Erin Allen, Meyer Swain, Lise Campbell, Kelly Hollins, and Amy Erb.

the cake was being cut. Though it seemed no room was left for more, the almond cake with butter-cream frosting proved irresistible, and as friends finished, it was with full hearts that they reluctantly said goodbye. 

Jane Grau is a freelance writer who wrote about a Spanish-inspired house for our last issue.

Please see the Resource Guide on page 84 for more information.

Recipes

Provided by Chef Bruce Schlermitzauer
of Porcupine Provisions

SPRING PEA SOUP WITH MINTED CREME FRAICHE

The crisp smell of fresh mint adds just the right contrast to this chilled green soup.
Serves 6.

Soup:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 leek, chopped (white only)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 2 cups water
- Salt and white pepper to taste
- 3 cups fresh or frozen peas

Heat olive oil in a saucepan then

add leek, stirring and cooking until tender. Add bay leaf, thyme, and water; bring to a simmer and cook 20 minutes. Season with salt and white pepper to taste. Add peas, bring to a simmer, and cook until peas are tender. Transfer to blender and purée until smooth. Remove from blender and strain through a fine strainer. Chill for 2 hours.

To serve:

- 1/2 cup heavy cream
 - 1/2 cup crème fraîche
 - 3 tablespoons fresh mint, chopped
- Stir heavy cream into soup and adjust seasoning to taste. Using 6 chilled single-serving bowls, pour soup into bowls. Garnish each top with a swirl of crème fraîche and sprinkling of chopped fresh mint.

BUTTERY LOBSTER TAILS WITH POLENTA AND HERB SALAD

A cheese-flavored polenta is cut into rounds, then topped with a fat curl of butter braised lobster that's gamished with herbs tossed in lemon juice and olive oil. Serves 6.

Polenta:

- 3 cups water
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons butter

Bring water to a boil. Add salt and whisk in cornmeal. Simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and add cheese and butter, stirring until smooth. Transfer into a baking dish at least 5 1/2" x 8" and chill until firm (3-4 hours). Using knife, loosen polenta from dish and carefully transfer to cutting board. Mark 6 circles, each 2 1/2" in diameter. Using knife held straight, gently cut rounds of polenta for serving.

Lobster tails:

- 6 quarts water
 - 6 lobsters, weighing 1 1/4 pounds each
- Prepare a large bowl of ice water. In a large stockpot, bring 6 quarts of water to a boil. Drop in the lobsters (3 at a time) and cook for 5 minutes. Carefully remove lobsters from boiling water and drop into ice

water. When cool, remove from water, drain, and remove meat from shell in one piece. Claw meat can be reserved for another use. Take tail and roll into a ball, and secure with a skewer.

To assemble:

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup fresh herb leaves (chives, thyme, etc.)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Set out 6 serving plates. Heat butter in saucepan. Gently add polenta cakes.

Brown on one side then turn over, cooking for 1 minute on other side. Remove polenta cakes to individual plates. Add the skewered lobster tails to hot saucepan and cook for 5 minutes, turning every minute and basting with butter from pan to heat through. Remove lobster tails from pan; gently pull out skewers, and place each on top of a polenta cake. In small bowl, whisk together lemon juice and 3 tablespoons olive oil, then season with salt and pepper. Add herbs and toss. Top each lobster tail with salad and drizzle remaining olive oil around base as garnish.



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