

/// **THE SEARCH ENDS HERE:** We Found The Perfect Holiday Gifts ///

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HOLIDAY HOSTING

Party Pros Share
Their Best Tips
for Food, Décor
and More

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LIGHTING THE WAY

*Unsung Heroes
Who Create Change*

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Cocktails that
add sparkle to
every table

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this page:
Nikki Glekas set the sophisticated tone—and table—for a special gathering.

HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING

Three Stamford experts share their **DECORATING, FOOD** and **HOSTING** tips for for the party season

BY KIM KAVIN

Holiday entertaining is a bit like gingerbread cookies: Traditional never goes out of style, but it can be fun to add a new twist.

Three of Stamford's decorating, catering and entertaining experts say that no matter whether you're planning to host friends, families or co-workers this winter, and no matter whether your venue is a home or a business space, there are lots of ways to spice up holiday events—perhaps most surprisingly, by moving them outdoors.

“Especially coming off the pandemic, people are more comfortable and set up now to do really fun outdoor events, even when the weather is less than favorable,” says Robin

Selden, managing partner and executive chef of Marcia Selden Catering. “They have outdoor heaters, bonfires, outdoor pizza ovens—the possibilities are endless and really a fun way to bundle up and welcome the cold weather with friends and family.”

Nikki Glekas says her company, Nikki Glekas Collective, is also seeing outdoor entertaining as a trend throughout the tri-state area.

“One of the things that happened since Covid is that our outside catering business has really expanded,” she says. “People are wanting to show off the remodels that they did at their homes or at their offices.”

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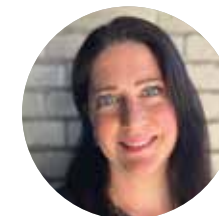
Panel of Experts



ROBIN SELDEN
Managing Partner and Executive Chef of
Marcia Selden Catering



NIKKI GLEKAS
Owner of
Nikki Glekas Collective



MEGAN RICKLICK
Floral Designer at
Stamford Florist



above: The pandemic made outdoor parties popular and the trend continues to gain momentum.

OUTDOOR TOUCHES

“You can order great fleece blankets that function as décor on the chairs, as well as a great way for your guests to keep warm by the fire.”

ROBIN SELDEN

At Stamford Florist, longtime designer Megan Ricklick says she and her colleagues are now also receiving regular requests for outdoor floral décor. Classics are still a big favorite, but contemporary ideas still have plenty of fans.

“We do a lot of traditional requests, including a wreath, a wrap around the doorway, or trees around the entryway with lights,” Ricklick says. “Sometimes we get more contemporary requests. Some people really like silver and gold balls or ribbons with curly branches. That’s interesting and gives you more of a contemporary look. We also have conical outdoor trees, which create a Dr. Seuss kind of whimsical style.”

Whimsical can come in a lot of shapes and sizes, including blankets that hosts can give away as gifts to guests at the end of the night.

“You can order great-looking fleece blankets that function as décor on the chairs but become a great way for your guests to keep warm by the fire,” Selden says.

She also urges clients to have a little fun with catering at outdoor events, where the options for food and drink can be different from the fare served at indoor events.

“Set up fun food and drink stations like a hot chocolate bar, mulled wine and cider, make-your-own cocktails or mocktails, a yummy chili station, or a chowder and soup station with awesome breads,” she says. “Dessert can be a s’mores station or a chocolate fondue station. These are all easy, make-ahead ideas, so that you can be a guest at your own party, particularly if you go with the fun outdoorsy idea.”

Glekas says one of her go-to tips for food at indoor and outdoor parties is a grazing table. It’s similar to food and drink stations because guests can create their own plates, and it can be ordered with all kinds of options depending on the ambience the host is trying to create.

“Grazing tables are still a hit, whether we do handheld grazing cups, charcuterie cups or a very long, 360-degree kind of grazing table,” she says. “It’s a very large charcuterie table with meats and cheeses. We include sweet items like chocolate-covered pretzels and dried fruit, fresh figs, different kinds of breads. We also add crudites and homemade dips, hummus and spicy feta dip.”

Selden even encourages adding those types of foods as a type of the holiday décor. She calls them “edible elements” for a tabletop. “Think hand-rolled breadsticks, hummus and crudites, and cheese boards for guests to enjoy while waiting for their first course.”

In terms of color, Selden says she’s seeing more people request monochromatics and neutrals. Ricklick says the hottest color in floral décor right now is also neutrals.

“There’s a demand for roses that are a café latte color,” Ricklick says. “These are hot cocoa colors. They’re extremely popular, but they’re hard to come by because growers only have a high sell rate in the winter months. They are browns and silvery-grays. This goes with the natural-tone trend.”

Those roses tend to pair nicely with natural elements, Ricklick adds. “What we’ve been seeing as a trend is very natural, neutral tones, natural branches, a lot of whites and beiges. For the winter, we see a lot of large pine cones and

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TRIED & TRUE

“We have a lot of traditional requests: a wreath, a wrap around the doorway or trees and lights at the entry.”

MEGAN RICKLICK



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY MARGIA SELDEN CATERING

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY STAMFORD FLORIST

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DECORATING WITH FOOD

Selden encourages adding those types of foods as an embellishment for holiday décor. She calls them “edible elements” for a tabletop. “Think hand-rolled breadsticks, hummus and crudites, and cheese boards. Guests can enjoy them while waiting for the first course.”

ROBIN SELDEN

PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILLIP VAN NOSTRAND

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HIGH SPIRITS

A key element of decorating any holiday space is to choose a theme. Everything, including the drinks, should be part of that theme.

ROBIN SELDEN

PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIE BIDWELL

branches with white lights.”

Glekas and Selden both say a key element of decorating any holiday space is to choose a theme. Everything from the food and drinks to the décor should be part of that theme, to fully immerse guests in a festive experience.

“Consider hosting themed parties, like a retro holiday Winter Wonderland or even a movie night featuring holiday classics,” Selden says.

Themes can also encourage certain behaviors in guests, Glekas says, making the experience easier for the host.

“The casino theme is still very popular,” Glekas says. “We’re doing that for a few parties this season. That theme tends to come in waves, and we’re in a wave now. Some companies, when they don’t want to promote a higher-drinking crowd, will go with a casino night because it allows guests to be interactive but not focus on drinking. I do it for my company. People get excited, and we encourage companies to offer prizes at the end. The theme encourages people to mingle with others they might not know.”

Glekas says that for company parties where there are limitations, such as being non-religious, a Winter Wonderland theme is ideal. And, it can be a lot of fun.

“We’re doing one with an ice luge for martinis,” she says. “I always try to make sure we’re coming up with new and fun ideas for each company.”

Winter Wonderland is also one of the themes Glekas says works well with balloon garland, which can be an interesting alternative to traditional florals.

“For example, there’s a metallic oversized balloon in silver that looks almost disco, but it adds to the flair of the Winter Wonderland theme,” she says. “Different shades of blue and silver work well. You can also add a very light green to that and it works nicely, especially if you add birch vases or birch candles, white amaryllis flowers, that kind of thing. If they do it in a big cluster, it’s a wow décor piece.”

Ricklick says that some clients still go with florals, but in unusual color schemes to create a similar wow factor.

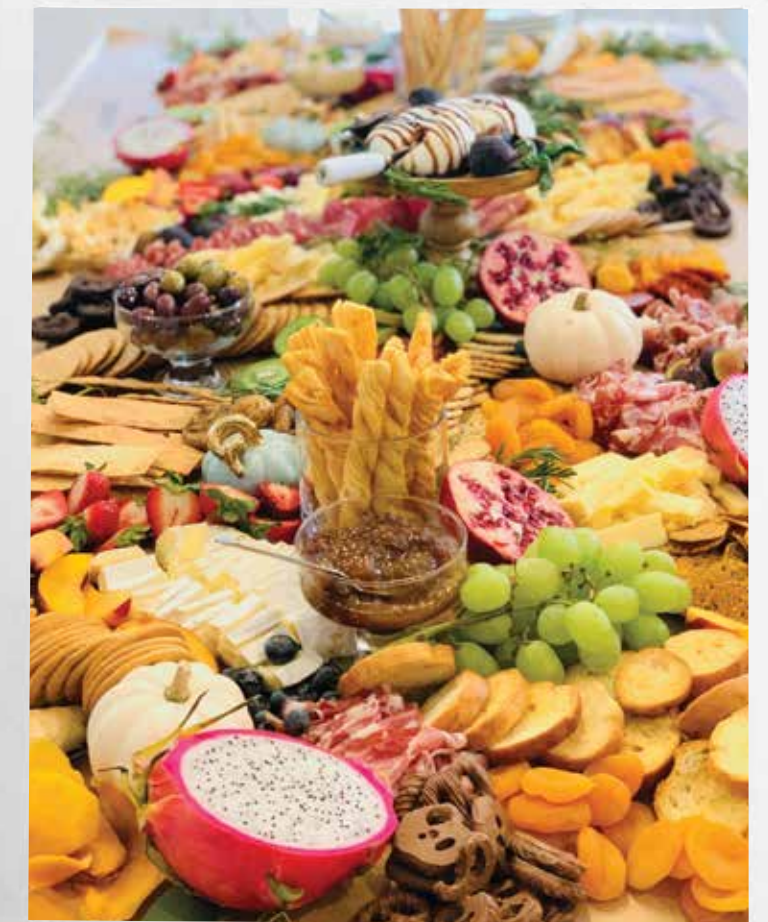
“Sometimes, if it’s for a corporate look downtown, they might want chrome or black,” Ricklick says. “Or all-red trees. They can really

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY NIKKI GLEKAS

INCREDIBLE EDIBLES

“Grazing tables are still a hit, whether we add handheld cups, charcuterie, or a very long, 360-degree kind of experience.”

NIKKI GLEKAS



HOT PETAL PALETTE

“There’s a demand for roses that are a café latte color. These are hot cocoa colors and they’re extremely popular.”

MEGAN RICKLICK



get decked out.”

Ricklick is also seeing a turn toward texture, as opposed to just color, when people order flowers for holiday décor. Table centerpieces, fireplace garland, wreaths—a lot of them are now being ordered with texture, because it’s just as important as color.

“We use things like trick, which is a green, fuzzy flower,” she says. “There’s thistle, which comes in blue or silvery-gray. That adds a wonderful texture and depth to the arrangement. There’s focus on more than just color. It’s about the style and texture of the flowers creating a composition.”

Creating that composition includes getting the size right. One of the biggest mistakes people make when ordering floral décor, Ricklick says, is good old-fashioned overkill. She advises clients to take a realistic look at the space they want to fill before calling to place an order.

“What’s appropriate in size for the table or porch that you have?” she says. “Sometimes people buy a nine-foot tree and it makes the house look small. Also look at the colors in your house. If your dining room is blue, then white

and silver would complement that space nicely. You really have to consider the space you have, and then we can customize everything to your needs.”

Selden also says it’s important to know what you have on hand, and how to use it. Especially for in-home entertaining, many clients already have a lot of the elements they need to create a memorable event, including the place settings and stemware for a wine-pairing dinner.

“Break out the sterling, fine china and crystal, and really elevate the presentation,” Selden says. “People eat with their eyes, so use the good stuff that you have in your inventory. It will really help take the food and presentation to the next level.”

Glekas says another way to impress just about any guest is with a signature drink that matches the party’s theme. The type of drink can really be anything, as long as it goes with the theme—because it plays into the overall experience that guests hope to have.

“When you’re a guest, you just want to enjoy the time there,” Glekas says. “You don’t want to think. You want to be told it’s delicious. Nine times out of 10, guests take that signature cocktail. When they arrive, they want to get the full experience.”

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TEXTURE TREND

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MEGAN RICKLICK



PHOTOGRAPHY: ROSES © DANNICHEZ - STOCK.ADOBE.COM; THISTLE © CHARLOTTE - STOCK.ADOBE.COM; OPPOSITE PAGE: BRIAN DORSEY STUDIOS

this page: To create a memorable event, break out the sterling, fine china and good crystal. And for the centerpiece, remember to add texture, which today is just as important as color.

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