

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Holiday hacks and **EXPERT ADVICE** from local chefs, caterers and hosts who've mastered the art of pulling it all off.

If there's one thing **MARCIA SELDEN CATERING** proves every season, it's that holiday entertaining should be as fun as it is festive. Their signature mix of classic dishes, clever twists and a little drama behind the bar keeps guests entertained, fed and impressed, year after year. To give us a peek behind the curtain, **ROBIN SELDEN** shares her take on the latest trends and tips for creating a truly unforgettable event.

PLATES THAT POP

Let your menu double as décor. Think vibrant reds from pomegranate seeds or dried cherries paired with verdant baby arugula, winter lettuces and fresh herbs.

PEARLS OF WISDOM

Decadence never goes out of style. Caviar served in gilded golden eggs with mashed potatoes and chives or from lucite trays with crème fraîche and blini instantly elevates any gathering. Guests



above: Set up a caviar station, and let guests customize their bites for an elegant moment without the stress.

can't help but grin as servers parade trays past their noses.



above: Swap your espresso martini for a Brûléed Blond.

MAKING SPIRITS BRIGHT

The drinks should be as memorable as the party itself. From torch-topped Brûléed Blond Martinis—complete with aquafaba whipped like meringue and finished with sugar—to gin and bourbon showcases, curated spirit bars and champagne vending machines, we treat beverages as the main event. Want to keep the party going? Midnight walk-around espresso martinis have you covered.

EXIT STRATEGY

The party doesn't have to end when the lights go up. Guests love taking something playful home: bacon-egg-and-cheese "EGGS-it" sandwiches served from trays, or mini bakery boxes filled with cookies and candies from the dessert display. Oversized holiday cookie stations are essential, and guests gleefully scoop, stack and snack their way through take-home boxes—essentially a cookie swap without the prep.

EDIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Stations are no longer just functional—they're full-on edible art. Picture Mediterranean and Tuscan mezze spreads stacked with marinated veggies, hummus in every flavor and dips so vibrant they could double as centerpieces. Tables are layered with fruit and vegetable accents that add texture, color and a little drama, while charcuterie and breadsticks sit out front, ready to be admired—and devoured—before the first course even arrives.

KICK IT OLD-SCHOOL

Classic menu items are back, and in some cases, they never really left. Prime rib, generous and falling-off-the-plate, remains a perennial favorite, while short ribs consistently top request lists. Giant tomahawks make a dramatic statement at carving stations or family-style dinners, and honey-glazed spiral ham shows up again and again, a reminder that some holiday staples are worth keeping.

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

Holiday entertaining is all about balance: honoring the traditions guests love while weaving in unexpected, memorable touches that showcase the creativity and personality of Marcia Selden Catering. From torch-kissed cocktails to decadent caviar tins, or even a playful bacon-egg-and-cheese "EGGS-it" moment, every detail is designed to leave a lasting impression

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above: It's cookie time! Let partygoers go wild by creating their own to-go bags with an assortment of holiday treats. **below:** Braised short ribs are always a winter favorite, made modern with an artful base of butternut squash purée.



Pro Tips

Host smarter, not harder



SIDE HUSTLE

Chef **Julia Deane's** top holiday hack is simple—and endlessly adaptable: serve side dishes at room temperature. "People get nervous about everything being ready at the same time," she says. "Green beans are a great side dish. You can blanch them in advance and toss them in vinaigrette. You can do the same thing with asparagus."

Other vegetables, like carrots, cauliflower, or broccoli, can be treated the same way. Dressings can be switched up—citrus or miso, with the addition of raisins or nuts—so that even room-temperature sides feel fresh and flavorful.



AT YOUR SERVICE

Sure, your 12-year-old neighbor can set the table (and maybe finally master the art of ironing a tablecloth), but why stop there? Bring in pros to finish and warm dishes, serve, bartend

and handle the post-feast cleanup. **Catering Staff by Mary Watters** does exactly that. Your only job is to supply the food, whether it's homemade or picked up from local favorites like Palmer's Market, Garelick & Herbs or Trader Joe's.

IT'S ALL RELATIVE

Even during the holiday frenzy, restaurateur and cocktail connoisseur **Peter Valis** treats the season like a production. "I love hosting family and friends, and for me the season really starts in September when I start planning," he says. Christmas Eve tops his list, with a cocktail party for around 40 guests.

PANTRY PREP

For **Myrna LaHood**, getting a jump on holiday entertaining starts with the basics. The restaurateur behind Bar Vera in Stamford and Myrna's Kitchen in Greenwich swears by having the essentials on hand.

"Stock the kitchen with the essentials: cocktail napkins, candles, table linens; and make sure you have enough glasses and dishes. Stock the bar with sparkling wine. People love Champagne over the holidays. Tequila and vodka are musts. For mixers, orange juice, and grapefruit juice is currently very popular. Add

club soda, tonic, olives and cocktail onions. Stock the kitchen with crackers and breadsticks, cornichons, roasted peppers, artichoke hearts, olives and add cheeses and charcuterie for a quick antipasto."

Christmas Day, though, belongs to the family chefs. "My partner/cousin usually handles the roast, while my nieces take on the butternut squash soup, salad, sides and all the fixings. Our mothers always prepare all of the desserts. I'm usually the unofficial bartender. I guess our holiday hack is that everyone chips in."

"Everyone chips in," that's a tradition worth keeping.

