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WINE ENTHUSIAST[®]

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Special Celebrations in Restaurants

A special-occasion dinner at a restaurant is made even more special by the fact that you don't have to clean up when the party is over. However, it can require almost as much planning as hosting at home. Many restaurants offer private dining rooms, and many more will create a special menu for the group.

- Call the restaurant at least 30 days in advance to inquire about private dining rooms and the possibility of a custom-made menu. Visit the restaurant before booking and speak with the manager and/or chef. Ask about the minimum number of guests and the cost of a private room with dedicated servers, service fees and gratuities.
- For larger groups, many restaurants will serve a prix-fixe dinner, allowing the guest to select an appetizer, a meat, a seafood or pasta entrée and a dessert. Know in advance exactly what is included. Inform the chef in advance of any guests' specific dietary needs or allergies.
- Be clear on what the restaurant's responsibilities are and what you will provide. Are you bringing your own cake, or is the pastry chef baking it? Who prints the menus?
- If you are planning to open some special bottles of wine, find out the restaurant's corkage policy. If the restaurant does not permit corkage, speak with the sommelier to help choose the best wines to match the food and suit your budget.
- Ask about decorations, and make sure whatever you bring to the restaurant is appropriate for the atmosphere. Mylar balloons are out of place in a fine-dining establishment, while tasteful, low-to-the-table floral arrangements are at home most anywhere.
- Printed invitations delivered to your guests by old-fashioned mail signify the importance of the occasion. Follow up with e-mail, if necessary.
- Decide beforehand whether your early arrivals will have a drink at the main bar, or if you will offer wine in a private area.

—MIKE DeSIMONE & JEFF JENSSEN

SNAPSHOT



Mean Streets of Tribeca, New York City

Actors Robert DeNiro and Harvey Keitel reconnect at the New York Academy of Art's Tribeca Ball, a scholarship fundraiser benefiting emerging artists. The event, held April 16, honored DeNiro for his contributions to the visual arts and the revitalization of Tribeca and featured pours of NV Brut, 1999 Palmes d'Or and mini bottles of NV One Fo(u)r Brut and Rosé courtesy of Nicolas Feuillatte, the event's exclusive Champagne sponsor.

—ANNA LEE C. IJIMA

LUXE life



Bordeaux Tour de Force Touring Bordeaux on your own can be great fun, but it won't be the lifetime highlight you will experience touring with James Lawther, MW, an English native and long-time Bordeaux resident. Simply put, Lawther is well connected, so his tour, from September 3–7, 2012, will have stops at Châteaux d'Yquem, Cheval Blanc, Latour, Palmer, Le Bon Pasteur (Michel Rolland), Ducru-Beaucaillou (pictured), Domaine de Chevalier, Raymond-Lafon, Teyssier, Smith Haut Lafitte and the négociant Millesima. The tour will feature Michelin-starred dining, including the two-star Hostellerie de Plaisance in St.-Émilion, lodging for four nights at the luxurious Les Sources de Caudalie, plus a tour of the medieval city of St.-Émilion. "This year, we added a visit and lunch at Château Teyssier, producer of Le Dôme and other single-vineyard wines," Lawther says. "The owner, Jonathan Malthus, is larger than life." Cost per person, double occupancy, is \$3,500, including tax, plus airfare. This and other tours are available at finevintagetld.com. —ROGER MORRIS