

Blue Lagoon.
 Champagne glasses:
 Villeroy & Boch
 Water glasses: Riedel
 Striped bowls: IITala
 White plates:
 Thomas
 Blue Plates: Arzberg

TABLE MANNERS

Festive Settings.

Life is full of rituals and traditions. That is never more apparent than at festive times, especially on and around the table. **Mireille Guiliano**, author of the recent bestseller *French Women for All Seasons*, shares her dos and don'ts on creating the perfect table setting for the festive season.

Some *Do's*

Do remember holiday entertaining at home or in a restaurant is not about you but about the guests and about bringing together people who can enjoy one another's company. Brillat Savarin, the great French gastronome, insisted that we are responsible for the well-being of our guests while they are in our home. As host or hostess you want people to relax and enjoy both the food and the company...and to savour the pleasures you provide.

Do pay close attention to seating in order to promote comfort and conversation. Normally the host and hostess have the choice of sitting at the ends of a long table or in the middle facing one another. Formal protocol requires that the "guest of honour" be seated on the host's right, but at gatherings of family and friends, that idea is easily scrapped to facilitate community discourse. The other choice is whether to seat couples side by side or break them up. Consider what your guests would prefer. My first choice is to break up couples and for the host and hostess to switch places at some point during a meal.

Do match your table settings to the tone and purpose of the gathering. There's festive and there's festive. There are quiet, formal and classical restaurants, and there are noisy, lively, casual restaurants. There are white table cloths and no table cloths.

Do arrange the food on the plate to look as attractive and inviting as you hope it tastes. Following the three-colour

rule on plates helps to ensure three desirable objectives: attractiveness, balanced nutritional values, and moderate-sized servings. So, something as simple as a lamb chop (brown) served with carrots (orange) and string beans (green) can make for a balanced main course on all counts.

For formal festive occasions, do set the table with all the accoutrements – from cloth napkins to your best dinnerware, glassware, and cutlery.

Do use the right glasses matched to the wines, such as flutes or tulip glasses for Champagne, balloon glasses for Pinot Noir, and small glasses for a dessert wine. A sweet wine for dessert is a nice touch if you know your guests will appreciate it.

Do think quality over quantity as well as simplicity in all things. In our life of excesses, we especially overdo it at festive times, only to regret it later. Making it special does not have to mean making it significantly longer or bigger.

Do be ready, make the time, to greet your guests and introduce them to each other. That means you've arranged things in the kitchen to give you time to step out, and there are no last-minute wardrobe changes.

Do let your guests know what they'll be eating and drinking even if it's a buffet. In our societies of overabundance, it's silly to gorge oneself, and knowing what to expect will help most people make sounder choices.



Asian Flair.
 Glassware: Spiegelau
 Bowls: Orrefors
 Plates & Chopsticks:
 Asa
 Knife: Pott
 Napkins: Garnier
 Thiebaut

Don't let your guests arrive and drink on an empty stomach – it's not good for one's stomach...or head. You don't have to serve anything fancy or expensive, just a little fat and proteins as in, say, olives, slivers of cheese, nuts, salami or chorizo, or something on toast. Don't let the "cocktail" hour run too long: 30 minutes is a good average.

Don't think dinnerware has to match or be the most expensive China or porcelain. Today there are many options of clear or coloured dishes at affordable prices. I like to mix-and-match plates and patterns. So don't worry if your dishes or knives don't match. You can use one pattern for men and another for women if you want a system.

Don't use overwhelmingly scented flowers in the dining room or on the table as they detract from the aromas and even the taste of the food or wine being served. And either don't use high centrepieces that block eye contact, or if you do, remove them when you serve the first course.

Don't hesitate to interrupt or intervene if the conversation goes the wrong way or if a guest tends to deliver monologues.

Don't play music during the meal, or at most only softly, as a background. Conversation and laughter should do.

Don't let guests stay past bed time: as hostess or host you can signal departure time diplomatically.

Don't feel you must sit at the table for coffee – and nothing clicks shut a pearl box of a dinner like an after-dinner Espresso and a square of chocolate. Rising to enjoy coffee standing or sitting in another room can be a nice move to signal the festive gathering should end within half an hour.

Some Don'ts

Don't be intimidated by table culture and being the host. Entertaining is a bit like public speaking. People fear it and obsess over it and think of the worst things that can happen and not the best. But with experience, people learn to handle it and derive pleasure. Lots of people don't entertain much because they see cooking as a chore, or feel they have to be very fancy and make it perfect because their entire self is being judged by the perfection of their party. My advice is, relax and just do it.

Don't wait too long to start if someone is late and has not called. Fifteen to thirty minutes is courteous enough; after that it's unfair to make your guests wait for the late-comers.



Volluto Feast.
 Glassware: SIA
 Plateware:
 Fürstenberg
 Flatware: Coledampf's
 White tablecloth:
 Lene Bjerre
 Gold table runner:
 Sander