

Blasts from the PAST

Shake up your holiday entertaining with a retro party theme

BY KELLY MAGYARICS

If you'd like your party to stand out during the crowded holiday entertaining season, consider looking to the past. Retro-themed holiday parties—be it a roaring '20s bash, early-'60s soiree, trippy-dippy '70s shindig, or sleek '90s setup—provide a different spin on the routine seasonal affair. Our four guides make it easy to pull off, with creative ideas for decorations, music, drinks and food. Make the guest list, set the mood, and take your friends on a trip to another decade.

1920s

THE SET UP: "Boisterous, jazzy and sophisticated" describe that oft-romanticized era of bootleggers, the Charleston and flappers, says Bob Page, director of sales and marketing at the Omni William Penn Hotel in Pittsburgh, home to The Speakeasy, a '20s-inspired lounge. Create a swing and jazz playlist, dimly light the space with candles, and ask everyone to dress the part with fringed dresses, bobbed hair and white suits. And like a true speakeasy, create a password for entry that you text to guests the day of the event.

THE DRINKS: Although Prohibition was the law of the land throughout the '20s, many classic cocktails were born behind closed doors and in speakeasies to mask the unpalatable flavors of bathtub gin and other bootleg spirits. Shake up a favorite of the era, the bee's knees, a mix of gin, lemon and honey served in a cocktail glass. (Its name is '20s slang for "the best.")

Evoke Jay Gatsby's over-the-top parties in F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous novel with party-food-friendly Moët & Chandon Impérial Brut Champagne. Despite Prohibition, the sparkler, one of the first Champagnes to target the U.S. market, was illegally imported into the country for wealthy consumers. Matthew Volker, wine specialty coordinator for Fine Wine & Good Spirits, says it works with everything from potato chips to caviar.

THE FOOD: Said to have been invented in Rhode Island in 1917, clams casino is always a crowd pleaser, says Michael Welsh, founder and managing partner of Philadelphia's Brick and Mortar. Serve them on a platter of rock salt with lemon wedges to brighten up the dish. Party-goers in the '20s also nibbled on fatty snacks to absorb their spirit of choice, says Omni William Penn Hotel director of food and beverage Brian Annapolen. He suggests a charcuterie table with coppa, soppressata, sharp cheddar cheese, pickled cocktail onions and gherkins and, for dessert, individual pots de crème.

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The Bee's
Knees

Moët & Chandon
Impérial Brut

Clams Casino



Vodka Martini

Hanky Panky

Deviled Eggs

1960s

THE SET UP: AMC's hit TV drama *Mad Men* sparked a new love affair with the early 1960s when it first hit the airwaves.

"This era was such a good time to party!" declares Heather Rodkey, general manager for Rex 1516 in Philadelphia. She loves the look of fit-and-flare dresses, mini A-line skirts, fishnet stockings and natural hair, and pictures "men sitting back in a gorgeous Mies van der Rohe chair with a whiskey on the rocks in a silver-tipped cocktail glass beside a stand-alone ashtray." For an early '60s party vibe, she suggests soft lighting, midcentury calypso music to rev things up and Patsy Cline tunes to end the evening.

THE DRINKS: These vice-driven years require stiff libations like a manhattan or vodka martini or, Rodkey says, the Hanky Panky. (Traditionally, the Hanky Panky uses gin, but Rodkey prefers the smooth complexity of cognac.)

Studying ads from that time, Volker says French bottles reigned supreme. Opt for similar styles like Louis Latour Pouilly-Fuissé from Burgundy and Château Saint-Sulpice from Bordeaux. End the evening with Harveys Bristol Cream—the best-selling sherry in the '50s and '60s.

THE FOOD: A strong, well-chilled martini demands savory, briny bites like fresh olives and homemade pickles served on a sleek, stainless steel and glass lazy Susan. Rex 1516 executive chef Justin Swain says that spreads, relishes and dips were ubiquitous at cocktail parties in the late '50s and '60s—try pimento cheese, a Southern favorite best served at room temperature or chilled. Chris Mann, general manager of The Olde Bar in Philadelphia, suggests deviled eggs, pigs in a blanket, Jell-O molds and iceberg salad with cottage cheese and canned orange segments. "Basically anything out of the *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*."

Pimento Cheese

1970s

THE SET UP:

The swinging '70s were all about *Soul Train*, maxi dresses, disco balls and bell-bottoms, muses Christina Maffei, director of food and beverage for The Commoner in Pittsburgh. For your party decor, tie-dye, lava lamps and flowers will give a groovy, trippy and eclectic vibe. And music can run the gamut from disco to classic rock, from Donna Summer to Led Zeppelin. Use old 8-tracks as coasters, and set up a photo booth area with a disco-ball background and lots of props (wigs, sunglasses, beads and vests).

THE DRINKS: In this decade, "gone were the days of plain and simple, few-ingredient cocktails such as the manhattan and old-fashioned," Maffei notes. "In were the bright, sweet, sugary and fruity drinks of the disco era." For your affair, mix up concoctions like the Harvey Wallbanger, piña colada or Long Island Iced Tea.

Because of technical innovations during that time, wine shelves were peppered with wallet-friendly imports from around the world. Volker says bottles like Mateus Rosé and Blue Fish Sweet Riesling were sweet, unpretentious and incredibly quaffable. Domestically, California wines were coming into their own, especially after the 1976 Judgment of Paris, when a Napa cabernet and chardonnay beat out its Bordeaux and Burgundy counterparts, respectively. Pay homage to the native juice with Stag's Leap Winery Cabernet Sauvignon and Chateau Montelena Chardonnay.

THE FOOD: Dust off that fondue pot. Electric is best for broth or oil, while one that's Sterno- or candle-fueled works well for cheese or chocolate. Set out platters of ingredients to dip or cook, along with dipping sauces for savory fare.



Piña Colada



Cheese
Fondue

Harvey
Wallbanger



Appletini

Lobster
Potato Skins



1990s

Cosmopolitan

THE SET UP: Yes, the '90s are far enough in our rearview mirror to be considered retro. Welsh calls the decade "excessive, loud and transitional," remembering whitewashed jeans and rayon, along with "the wholesaling of hip-hop, 90210 and really bad music." (He takes exception to ska and reggae rock, though.) Welsh suggests going easy on the grunge, and is loyal to Philly's native sons Boyz II Men, along with *NSYNC and MC Hammer.

THE DRINKS: Thanks to *Sex and the City*, the cosmopolitan attained cult status in the late '90s, as did an entire category of drinks served in martini glasses that had absolutely nothing to do with the traditional gin and vermouth tippie (appletini, anyone?).

Hands down, Volker remembers, the most popular wines of the time were Australian shiraz, California merlot and Beringer white zinfandel. "However, to me, the '90s were grunge rock, and that means the Pacific Northwest." He reaches for Boom Boom! Syrah by Charles Smith.

THE FOOD: Casual, fun chain restaurants were all the rage in the '90s, serving shareable appetizers and bar food. Lobster potato skins, loaded nachos, mozzarella sticks, stuffed mushrooms and wings are all nosh-worthy options for your bash. Or, take inspiration from the SATC ladies and serve a platter of sushi alongside Asian-fusion dishes.

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