

Star power

Take it from the SAG experts and set a dinner party table with flair

By Sandra Barrera, Staff Writer

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The antipasto plate at the SAG Awards features Dungeness crab and grapefruit salad with Sriracha citrus emulsion, sugarcane laquered chicken with crispy corn grits cake, Seckle pear and ginger, short rib and sweet corn flan with wild mushroom ragout, heirloom tomato and burrata salad, basil oil, balsamic and Parmesan, and hand-made, freshly baked breadsticks. The plate is the work of chef Alan Jackson and will be served at the Screen Actors Guild Awards on Sunday, Jan. 25, 2009, at the Shrine Auditorium. (Photo by John McCoy/Staff Photographer)

Give your next dinner party a touch of classic Hollywood glamour.

The designers responsible for the table decor at Sunday's Screen Actors Guild Awards reveal their method for pulling together show-stopping centerpieces, settings and entrees at home. And, for many people, this should come in handy as the economy lurches through the recession.

According to the NPD Group, a leading market research company, growth in the restaurant industry fell flat last year as compared with a 2 percent growth in 2007. That means more Americans are eating in and entertaining at home rather than dining out with friends.

But it shouldn't have to mean skipping the convenience and enjoyment that come with dining away from home, which is



Alan Jackson shows off the food he'll be making for the guests at the 2009 SAG Awards. (John McCoy/Staff Photographer)

where our tabletop experts come into play.

"Everything we do here at our table is very accessible to anyone," says Andrea Wyn Schall, awards event supervisor.

Create a centerpiece

For many people, flowers are an integral part of a well-dressed table. The right floral arrangement should complement everything around it, from the food and china to the table linens.

Florist Christopher Matsumoto of Los Angeles-based C.J. Matsumoto and Sons Flowers did just that when he chose an organic, textured design for his low, streamlined and elegant centerpiece.

In a long, silver, rectangular container, creamy white calla lilies, dendrobium orchids and roses are arranged at both ends of chartreuse hydrangeas for dramatic effect. Smaller copycat arrangements are placed on each side of the main centerpiece to continue the eye down the length of the banquet table.

"All the elements together gives you this kind of motion, depth and a modern look," he says.

Can't find calla lilies or dendrobium orchids? Matsumoto suggests going with snap dragons to capture the same idea of motion. Chartreuse hydrangeas can be swapped out with green carnations as an alternative.



A model poses on the stage for the SAG awards, which will be held Saturday, Jan. 25, 2009 at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. (John McCoy/Staff Photographer)

And if a silver container is too formal, go with glass.

Put some thought into the table setting

Art director Keith Greco of Greco Decor in L.A. wanted the SAG Awards dinner table to look clean, simple and glamorous. So, he draped it in a black sheen cloth and silver silk satin runners with pinstriped napkins and set it with glass stemware, black china and simple flatware.

"Because the show is really about the actors and then probably what the food looks like on the table, the main thing is for me to create something that is not going to compete with what they might be wearing or who they are," Greco says.

Black might be too bold a choice for the at-home dinner party, but a host can still take a cue from the black-tie gala.

"I would spend money on the flowers and the food and the champagne," Greco says. "And the rest, go simple. You don't need a big fancy cloth or fancy flatware. Jazz it up with the napkins.

"There's nothing worse than a slippery napkin," he says. "So, pick it up and make sure it's the right weight."

Serving dinner

When the stars sit down to dinner at the SAG Awards table, they'll be treated to a feast for both the taste buds and eyes.

Chef Alan Jackson has created a combination of four small entrees - Moroccan Tagine-style chicken, crab salad with pickled endive and sriracha vinaigrette, braised short ribs on a creamy corn cake and a tomato and mozzarella salad - to play off the sweet and sour notes of the wine.

But he's got other ideas for the dinner party.

"Good old lasagna," Jackson says with a chuckle. "I think lasagna is great in a big crock.

"And maybe one of the ideas is that you make your own salad, whether it's roasting brussels sprouts and tossing them in balsamic vinegar, and letting that marinate, and then putting it in a bowl, and having a series of different bowls down a table that people can pass, or doing a charcuterie plate."

No time to cook?

Hit the food counter of your favorite grocery store for something you can serve at home. And don't forget the garnish.

"Sometimes the little touches can go a long way," Schall says.

"Maybe it's getting a piece of frise (that curly little lettuce) as a garnish or cutting a piece of flatbread in half and grill it to make it more decorative.

"You can use flat-leaf parsley, mint leaves or rosemary to garnish inexpensively but make it look very high end," she says. "Presentation is

everything." **SCREEN ACTORS GUILD AWARDS**

What: 15th annual awards show, broadcast from the Shrine Exposition Center.

Where: TNT and TBS.

When: 8 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 25, 2009.