

## Proper planning helps parties run smoothly

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Christmas is upon us and it's time once again to consider the age-old, time-honoured tradition that is the Christmas party.

Whether loved or despised, thrown or attended, Christmas parties are a holiday necessity, right alongside dry fruitcake and your uncle's rather unsubtly vodka-laced eggnog.

The problem with Christmas parties is that they only happen once a year, and so you really only have one shot at getting it right. Enter an expert: Vancouver-based event planner Sarah Morgan shares her Christmas party planning secrets, to avert nasty party pitfalls and ensure a smooth-running festive season.



CREDIT: NEWS photo Kevin Hill

Event planner Sarah Morgan is ready for the holidays in the photo above. For more information visit her website at [www.sarahmorganevents.com](http://www.sarahmorganevents.com).

### Party tip # 1: Think about giving

"It's the little touches that people sometimes overlook because they are focused on making sure the food is perfect, or something like that," says Morgan. Christmas, after all, is not just a time for gift giving, it's also time for giving to charities, says Morgan, especially if it's a corporate Christmas party.

Morgan suggests donating a sum of money to your charity of choice, and then breaking the sum down between all your guests. A simple card informing each guest that you have donated on behalf of them is an elegant and tasteful way to honor the spirit of the season, says Morgan.

Alternately, many charities offer small tokens, like handmade chocolates, so you can donate on behalf of your guests, then offer them the small token and everyone wins.

### Tip #2: Don't let your guests see you sweat

The key to a sit-down dinner, says Morgan, is not to overextend yourself.

"You want to make sure you're having fun too. Everyone wants their host to be having fun. It affects the whole party."

If you're hosting a party, nothing can be more perspiration-inducing than the possibility of cooking for a large group of people . . . badly. The trick? Keep it simple and stick to what you know.

If you are cooking and don't know where to start, Morgan suggests going online and checking out what some of the world's finer chefs are putting on their holiday menus as a jumping off point, and then trying your hand at replicating the dishes.

Some helpful hints to avoid running around 20 minutes to party time in an apron covered in half your dinner: Practice preparing your chosen dishes a couple of weeks beforehand, and pick dishes you can prepare ahead of time

and then warm up seconds before.

And when in doubt, cater, says Morgan resolutely.

#### Tip #4: Drink etiquette

As we all know, there are classy ways and not so classy ways to indulge in a holiday drink or three.

Two drinks per guest is how you should plan your glassware, says Morgan. That is, if you are serving wine, beer and martinis, you should have at least two wine, beer and martini glasses for each guest.

If your supplies and budget are limited, Morgan recommends wineglass charms or tags to ensure your guests can identify which glass belongs to them.

That way you aren't collecting and washing glasses halfway through the night, says Morgan, and you can also have Christmas themed tags for an added touch.

#### Tip #4: Adieu in style

No one wants to be liable, but you don't want to be the "drink nazi" either. (Note to Seinfeld fans: "No wine for you!")

Morgan's solution: set up an account with a local cab company so that guests can have a few drinks, hop into a cab, give the driver your account number and make it home safely.

And, of course, there's nothing like a small parting gift for guests to pick up on their way out, to "round out the evening," says our expert party planner.

Chocolates go a long way, and if you prefer the one-two punch, chocolates bought from a charity and offered at the end of the evening as party favours equals good karma all around, says Morgan.

Simply put: "Plan a meal that's easy, and allow yourself to have fun," says Morgan. "And maybe don't drink too much if you're the host," she adds laughing.

#### This season's party trends

- Goodbye sit-down dinners, hello cocktails.

Avoid: Formal sit-down dinner. People are definitely straying from them, says Morgan, because sitting at a long rectangular table doesn't encourage mingling.

Try: Round, standing cocktail tables with hors d'oeuvre on every table. And if your budget allows, minimize stress and ensure a smooth delivery by hiring a wait staff to serve the canapés.

- Themed drink parties.

Avoid: The tried, tested and true -- but boring -- beer, wine and eggnog.

Try: Beer, wine, and eggnog plus a themed drink. More and more people are centring their nights around a particular drink that's their own creation, says Morgan.

Try a festive favourite like candy cane martinis, and set up a tray of them at the door so everyone gets one as they walk in. You can even decorate to match the colours of the drink, suggests Morgan.

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