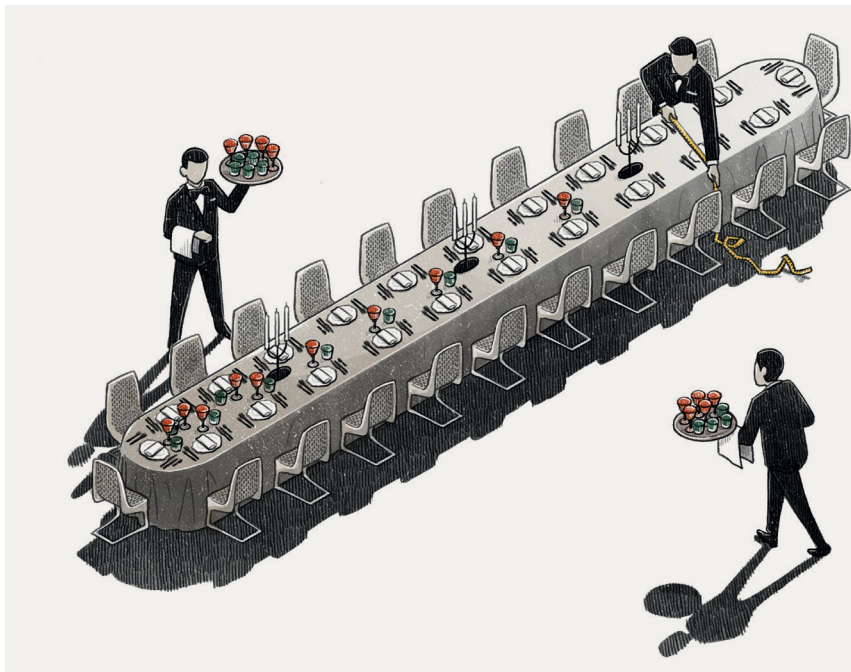


THE VINSON VIEW

Quality maniac and master shopper Nick Vinson on the who, what, when, where and why



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR A GREAT DINNER

- Put the work in to find a memorable venue.
- Use quality stemware that lives up to your wine. You can't go wrong with Baccarat, Saint-Louis or Lobjoy.
- Keep the table narrow and the decorative elements very low to encourage conversation.
- Take care of the details. Hire event producer Fiona Leahy, for example, the design brains behind many a terrific dinner.
- Work hard on getting the seating plan right. Always split couples.
- Hosts must know their guests.
- Only use recommended caterers, such as London-based Cellar Society. If you are organising a dinner in, say, Miami during Art Basel, fly them in.
- Avoid Kartell's 'La Marie' chair. It's a fabulous chair, but ubiquitous.
- Keep the numbers tight. Forget 'intimate dinner' - thanks to Berluti CEO Antoine Arnault, my new catchphrase is 'numerus clausus' or 'closed number'.

01 Making a meal of it

It's the details that take a dinner from disaster to delight

I get invited to a lot of fancy dinners. I have flown as far as Beijing, dined on the beach in Miami beside Charlotte Perriand's La Maison au Bord de l'Eau, in the Galerie des Batailles at Versailles, on the island of Capri, inside a fire station in Vitra's campus in Basel and at the very top of a chair lift above St Moritz. Great locations, terrific crowds, yet each new, beautifully calligraphed invite is opened with a mix of delight and dread.

The good evenings really stick in my memory, like the 2008 Versailles dinner held by Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, a reproduction of a 1938 meal held for King George VI. The table was laid with 13 pieces per head of Tommy crystal. For me, good stemware is essential element number two, second only to location. Marie-Paule Quercy-Momméja, the wife of Saint-Louis' then CEO, sat to my right. Her preparations had included devouring and memorising as many copies of Wallpaper* as she could get her hands on, a sign of a great hostess.

Berluti's dinner at Blain|Southern gallery in London had specially built tables with, in place of flowers, a trough down the centre filled with succulents, to ensure no foliage interfered with the conversation (essential element number three). It also boasted perfectly choreographed Cellar Society waiters dressed in patinated leather aprons and a meaty and masculine menu by chef

Valentine Warner. Our own 2010 Wallpaper* Design Awards dinner in Paris, where W* interiors director Amy Heffernan and I calculated that 90cm was the optimum table width, used chairs by Konstantin Grcic for Plank and staff dressed in Raf Simons for Fred Perry. Essential element number four: take care of the details. Between courses, we moved guests around, and not one high hitter, including Grcic, Simons, Pierre Hardy, the Bouroullec brothers, Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren, left before 1.30am. Occasionally, it's just one touch that sticks in the mind, like at Georg Jensen's dinner for Murray Moss at London's Serpentine Sackler Gallery, where water was served in silver Henning Koppel pitchers, masterpieces fit for museums.

Other meals have been memorable for the wrong reasons. Waiters mixing white and red wine in the same glass. Food that is slow to arrive or nonexistent - I've left dinners after 11pm having been offered only breadsticks. Cold food - a sure sign the caterers are not up to the level. Wide tables and oversized candelabra and flowers, limiting conversation to those on your direct left and right. Not checking if you and your seating companions share at least one language. Allowing no-shows and empty seats, a sign of lacklustre RSVP checks. So to all would-be hosts, please make a proper effort and hire wisely, or your guests may wish they had stayed at home. *



02

Service, please

My most wanted from Maison et Objet is this fun/bonkers 1967 'Stambul' coffee set by Wolf Karnagel from Berlin's Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur. kpm-berlin.com



03

Fur will fly

Top of my wish list from the January menswear shows in Milan is this mink-lined snaffle slipper by Gucci's new creative director Alessandro Michele. gucci.com