

Le Basque Catering Talks Holiday Party Planning

By Carissa Chesaneck
November 27, 2013



Planning for the holidays is no easy task, especially when tacking on a party to host in the midst of it all. Let's leave the planning to the experts and allow the Miami-based catering team [Le Basque](#) to help. We sat down with the company's president, Alejandro Muguerza, to chat about cocktails, food, decor and how to host the best holiday party this season.

Zagat: Tell us a little bit about your company. How did you start?

Alejandro Muguerza: We started with the idea of a catering company back in 1990 in London. I met Ian Michael Perris - he had already been in charge of some of the most emblematic and demanding households in the world - and he proposed to open a business together in London. However, I came to a wedding in Palm Beach as a guest and realized that there was a lot to do in Florida as it was an open territory with lots of opportunities to grow. Florida was cheap, London expensive. Florida warm, London cold. We had connections in both places, so we decided for the sun. There were excellent opportunities back then, since Miami was starting to transform from a sleepy resort community which had seen better days, into the metropolis that it is today. We truly feel we were part of that growth that brought it to where we are today.

Zagat: What are your favorite types of parties/events to cater?

AM: My favorites are very formal and intimate dinners for no more than 30 people. Lots of attention to detail... A well-informed, well-traveled client with a sense of place and tradition. In other words, demanding but knowingly so, and then everything flows to perfection. You both know what you want from each other, which makes things easier. The client has to trust you completely, and on the other hand, you always need to analyze the personality and the expectations of the client so you can create the very best that reflects their own taste.

Zagat: What are some tips you can give people who are planning holiday parties?

AM: Do not overextend yourselves. If you have a group, do a cocktail instead of a dinner. To make it simple, use your dining table or card table and make it a focal point. It will save you on staff and will be your food and decor at the same time. If you don't want to hire a caterer, use your best traditional recipes, the ones you dominate easily, or go to the closest gourmet store and order some prepared dishes that are easy to serve, like foie gras, fresh seafood, dipping sauces, imported cheeses, chutneys, artisanal bread, radishes, and exotic salt, but present it all in a festive and personal way. Use your best serving platters, play with height, volume and color and fill the gaps with holly, mistletoe and mercury balls. Holidays are special, and even with the most contemporary and minimal backdrop, a little baroque eclecticism goes to perfection.

Zagat: What are popular catering trends and foods you're seeing during the holidays?

AM: There is a naturalistic approach with seasonal products, foraged in an environmentally friendly manner and prepared using simple elaboration and natural combinations of available products, presented in natural earthenware, clay, slate and wood in various compositions. Food groups out of favor for a long time for the high contents in fats and cholesterol are back with a fury. Pork, lard, bone marrow, game and innards (brains, tripe, blood pudding, sweet breads). These are real delicacies and people are getting more cultivated and learning more about these wonders that were unthinkable in America ten years ago, while they have been a common staple in European popular and high cuisine.

Zagat: What is one thing that every host needs for their holiday dinner party and why?

AM: Good drinks, especially in the case that food is not abundant. Well-prepared cocktails, flowing good wine and champagne and above all, good friends (make sure you are very careful who you mix with whom, so everyone has a fun time). With those elements alone, the party will be a success.

Zagat: What are some great go-to foods to prepare for a cocktail party during the holidays? Ones that won't have the host spend all night in the kitchen?

AM: I love the Croque Monsieur they serve in [Harry's Bar](#) in Venice as a mini-sandwich, and we have our own version. We have been serving it for many years, and people attack them the moment they recognize these bite sandwiches. They are ridiculously easy to make, like a quick peanut butter one. The only things you need to have are good ingredients and a well-prepared, basic béchamel sauce that you can prepare in advance.

Zagat: What are techniques to make a holiday party look and feel its best? Special decor? Tables? Lighting?

AM: If you want a truly special evening, you have to create a special ambiance, and begin with your invited guests. Require a special dress code, perhaps especially formal. Use indirect lighting throughout. No bright fluorescent or cold white LED lights, please, they make every room look like a hospital kitchen. Warm, inviting incandescent lighting is the best, and amber tones are the most flattering, imitating the light of candles. Use them liberally. A well-scented house is a must. I use a combination of burning oils and candles. For the holidays and especially in the evening, go for woody, deep-scented candles: pine, amber, frankincense and the classic balsam potpourri. Avoid floral smells in the evening unless outdoors with night blooming flowers.

See more of the ways Mugerza sets the stage [here](#).

