

Winter Warm-Up

ENTERTAINING TIPS FOR HOSTING
A PERFECTLY COZY EVENING

By Sebastien & Sheila Centner

While this time of year we may be missing the warm summer days, there is something magical about getting together with friends and family for a warm and cozy winter evening. When the temperature drops and the snow starts to fall, it's difficult to not feel full of joy sitting by a roaring fire with a group of special people.

One of our favourite things about entertaining in the winter is hosting on a weekend when people are less likely to be rushing off to an activity. A weekend evening of casual entertaining indoors also lends itself to simpler pursuits where we can turn off phones, live in the moment, and replace the rush with a game of cards, backgammon, or charades.

Whether it's a special occasion, a relaxed gathering, or just an excuse to band your favourite group of people together, our winter warm-up menu will fit any event.

TABLE SETTING

Typically we like to start our table settings with a crisp tablecloth, but in this case since we have a great wooden table to work with, we used wood and greenery, and subtle touches of lighting to give the table a glow. Lay a long garland down the centre as a runner, scattering tea light candles throughout for ambient lighting.

Rather than resting your plateware directly on the table, we recommend using wooden charger plates. If that's not an option for you, or if you don't have a wooden table, no worries. Consider a burlap or tan coloured linen to get the same look.

An easy way to take your table setting up a notch is to use pomegranates for place cards. Whether you choose to write directly on the pomegranate or stick a name card in the stem, this chic DIY is sure to add an extra element to your décor.





Photos By: Bruce Gibson



MENU PLANNING

The easiest way to make sure your winter warm-up runs as smoothly as possible is to prepare as much as you can ahead of time. In an effort to prevent the “chaos in the kitchen” scenario, we’ve suggested three canapés for this meal that can be made in advance and should be ready to serve as your guests arrive.

First is a sliced baguette with a variety of spreads: Duck Rillettes, Garlic Confit, and Herbed Chèvre. We recommend making these spreads the day prior, to let them rest in the fridge up until guest arrival.

To complement the baguette and spreads we have a Cranberry Baked Brie and Gougères. Baked brie is the perfect blank canvas to showcase a variety of toppings. Get creative or use whatever you have in your kitchen to make this dish your own!

As guests finish their welcome cocktails and slowly move on from the delicious canapés, it’s time to start the seated portion of the meal. The first course, Ham & Bechamel Baked Tomatoes, will make you feel like you just came in from skiing.

Next, we go to our main course. When you picture the perfect winter meal up at a chalet, you’d be hard-pressed to find a better-fitting main course than Boeuf Bourguignon. This may be one of our more tedious dishes, but it will have guests begging for the recipe in the days following.

Since Boeuf Bourguignon is such a heavy dish, and roast vegetables are mixed in with it, we recommend not overwhelming your guests with too many sides. A single side dish of Parisian-styled mashed potatoes is always the perfect match for this hearty dish.

Between the main and dessert, we like to serve an individual cheese course – as it helps elongate the evening and pairs perfectly with the wine your guests are already enjoying. The quantity of cheese we like to offer depends on how many people we’re hosting, but as a basic rule, we aim to have at least 1 ½ oz per person and a minimum of three cheeses to choose from.

Finally, we offer a super simple dessert of vanilla ice cream with dark chocolate sauce – aka Dame Blanche. The name of this easy-to-make dessert comes from

an old French tale. The story goes that a ghost named Dame Blanche would block a bridge in Normandy and that only those who stopped to dance with her would be allowed to pass. Seb’s mom used to recite this story as they enjoyed their ice cream and chocolate sauce.

DRINKS

For our winter soirée we’re bringing back the classic martini bar setup to warm up your guests. Here are three variations we like to include:

First, the Espresso Martini. It offers a richer alternative to the other two cocktails and provides a little pick-me-up early in the evening.

Then we move to the fan favourite Cosmopolitan. This cocktail is truly perfect to sip by the fire as you nibble on canapés and socialize with your guests.

Lastly, we can’t leave out the Classic Martini. More traditional than the Cosmo, the Classic Martini is a welcome sign to most as it can be mixed with either vodka or gin. And don’t forget to stock up on garnishes – you never know who might be the “extra olives” type!

Once our guests move to the table, we switch to red wine. While there’s nothing wrong with continuing cocktails through dinner, a nice red wine will pair beautifully with the rich menu.

Tips & Tricks

We recommend decanting older wines (5+ years) 1 hour before guests arrive but leave the bottle next to the decanter in case guests are interested in seeing which wine you selected.

Lay out all your dinner and glassware the night before so that it’s easy to see what you will be using to serve each course with.

Duck Rillettes keeps for 7-10 days in the fridge, so it’s great to keep on hand for a decadent weeknight meal.

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