

DOUBLE ISSUE

Southern Living®

THE SOUTH'S BEST

BEACH TOWNS, BARBECUE JOINTS,
BAKERIES, CITIES, PARKS, AND
OTHER HIDDEN GEMS

Sanibel
Island,
Florida

Festive Easter Recipes

Ultimate Guide to the Smokies

Backyard Birding Secrets

Darius Rucker: Southerner of the Year

APRIL 2021

IN HER SHOES

Par for the Course

No one knows how to
get set for Masters week
better than Augusta,
Georgia, caterer Vera Stewart

BY BETSY CRIBB



PARTY STYLE
Vera pairs her
go-to statement
earrings with a
Tuckernuck dress.

HAIR, MAKEUP, AND WARDROBE STYLING: MEKO DAVIS/ZENOBIA

LEARNING TO ENTERTAIN as a newlywed in Madison, Georgia, was something of a baptism by fire, says Vera Stewart. “In that small town, if I had a dinner party, I invited the people across the street, who were old enough to be my grandparents; the local House of Representatives official, who was my parents’ age; and then my peer group,” says Vera. “I found out early on that I had to bring my A game if I was hosting in Madison.” More than four decades and a move to Augusta later—with a catering company, a cookbook, and nine seasons of a syndicated TV program (*The VeryVera Show*) to her name—it’s hard to imagine her ever being a novice hostess. She’s especially busy during Masters Tournament week in April, when (in a normal year) hordes of golf fans descend upon the city. She and her team have hosted up to 40 events in just one night. “I love the mania, believe it or not,” says Vera. “I’m geared up. When it’s over, I’m on such a high that I don’t even need to take a day off!” Here, the party pro talks about her childhood role model, her makeup mainstays, and her means of staying motivated.

THE WOMAN WHO INTRODUCED ME TO ENTERTAINING

“Back in the olden days, when I was 9 or 10 years old, I could get on the *Nancy Hanks II* train in Macon without my mother and ride to Atlanta to spend a few days with my grandmother. She would set out breakfast at her little kitchen table using silver and serve a grapefruit cut in half with a cherry in the middle. She taught me what a grapefruit spoon was. I was completely enthralled. I was the middle of five children, so my mother wasn’t doing all that stuff at home. She was lucky to get us all dressed and out the door. But my grandmother loved to set the table.”

ADVICE FOR ASPIRING ENTREPRENEURS

“Take it slow. My first catalog was a piece of white paper with green ink. Then, it was one picture that had every product in it. Your customers become part of the foundation, and I think that’s why *The VeryVera Cookbook: Recipes from My Table* did so well in the first print in 2018. People felt like they had been with me all along the way; they had walked the path alongside me. Developing a business plan that incorporates some sort of engagement with your clients is important.”

A CLOSET STAPLE I LOVE

“For me, there is nothing like a white blouse. I may have seven of them with different collars and fits that I can pull out at any given time. As long as the white shirt is closest to my face, I can get away with adding a lot of colors that I might not generally wear, like red.”

MY (FREE) BEAUTY SECRET

“I have been wearing Merle Norman Cosmetics probably since I was 16. I love their skin-care products. I’m very comfortable with them, and they actually have an HD makeup that I wear when I do *The VeryVera Show* because those lights are harsh. But it doesn’t look any different than what I have on day to day. That said, I think the best beauty product you can have is water. I drink a lot of it.”

WHERE I FIND ENERGY

“I looked in the mirror when I turned 49 and said, ‘I’m going to be fit at 50.’ I gave myself a year, but I’m way fitter now than I was then, and I’m 68. I have a personal trainer I’ve worked with for nine years. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I never know what I’m going to be doing; it’s a complete mystery until he shows up. I do an upper-body workout myself on Mondays, lower body on Wednesdays, and cardio on Fridays. Some people dye their hair. I pay for a personal trainer.”

Very Augusta

Vera spills the secrets to egg salad, a Masters-week favorite

Mama’s Egg Salad

Place 8 large eggs in a medium saucepan; cover completely with water. Cover saucepan with lid, and cook over high heat until the water comes to a complete boil. Turn off the heat, and let eggs sit 20 minutes. Remove the lid, and run cold water over eggs until they are cool to the touch, about 3 minutes. Peel immediately. Coarsely chop eggs. Stir together $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sweet pickle relish (drained of juice), $\frac{1}{4}$ cup mayonnaise, 1 heaping Tbsp. Durkee Famous Sauce, $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt, and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. black pepper in a large bowl. (If you can’t find Durkee locally, substitute yellow mustard and extra mayonnaise.) Add the chopped eggs, and gently mix until incorporated. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator up to 6 days. Serve the egg salad on toasted white bread with bacon and tomato, if desired.

ACTIVE 20 MIN. -
TOTAL 45 MIN. - SERVES 4

