

CHAPTER 2

TO DINE
SOUTHERN



Southern Celebrations

that are oh so Very...



A UNIQUE SETTING SETS THE TONE FOR A CELEBRATION THAT GUESTS WILL REMEMBER FOR YEARS TO COME.

In Augusta, Georgia, as well as many Southern towns, celebrations take on an “over the top” branding. From elaborate children’s birthday parties to table settings and decorations benefiting the occasion, a lot of meaningful planning goes into each one. Most women my age refer back to these sort of childhood memories and hopefully my children and grandchildren will do the same.

EASTER may or may not have the elaborate flair that it deserves here in Augusta based on which Sunday in the month Easter falls. Often, it falls during the week of The Masters Golf Tournament and many local families are not at home. However, many of us choose to have our Peter Rabbit moment in the weeks prior to the celebration of Easter. For this celebration, we were lucky the weather cooperated to be able to have the children celebrate outside in a magical Easter Garden. Our friends at Replacements Ltd with Keith Winkler stepped right in with amazing ideas and suggestions for the table appointment. As we like to reinforce in our Cooking Camp in Augusta, children should be exposed to “breakables” early on in order to recognize the difference and to begin to feel comfortable with manners, etiquette and the formalities.

Our picnic table is an antique children’s composite of two benches, two small Windsor chairs and a rectangular table. The Classic Peter Rabbit dinner plates by Zrike worked really well with the Bunny mugs from Gracie Bone China—easier for the children to handle rather than a glass. I loved Keith’s choice of Napoleon Bee stainless by Wallace Silver as the youth silverware and with many of the items I recommend, they can pass down to the next generation along the way. The crinkle cut in pink and yellow compliment the plates, along with the Kat McCall designed Easter Egg place cards and lovely invitation for this brunch.

Another Southern tradition is the Fairy Garden. Moms and grandmothers alike have enjoyed adding this delightful addition to their backyards or a large container that can be managed from a porch or patio. In this instance, we created a tablescape that allowed the Royal Doulton’s vintage Beatrix Potter figurines to come to life. Collections are another tell-tale sign of our Southern culture, and I’m always amazed at how something from my childhood continues to live through its introduction to my grandchildren. Having these figurines in a bookcase or china cabinet is an appropriate display option but bringing them to the forefront on special occasions will make quite the conversation piece. I can see Beatrix Potter and her friends coming to Thanksgiving or Christmas celebrations, too.

As a caterer of over 40 years, I’ve learned that a unique display can set the tone, and you can “fake” the finale by having smaller petite versions of

the cake to serve or by doing a sheet cake that can be cut into squares. So, finding just the right baker in your neighborhood to create the image (whether in styrofoam or cake) can be the centerpiece of “the look” and then the party doesn’t END when the cake gets cut. As long as there is plenty of icing on everything else, the party will be a hit!

Embellishments to include a ladder for those figures to climb to the top and a path made of crushed Oreos — use your imagination once you have the basics of your display. For example: Easter Egg malted milk balls in tiny

nests, candied carrots, and pastel jellybeans as a “stone” path instead of the Oreo “dirt”. Since Easter is one of those holidays where the date changes each year, it could still be very cold outside in the South if the date falls in March or extremely warm if it lands closer to the end of April. Be prepared if it is cold with those cute white Sweaters for the girls and maybe sweater vests for the boys. If warm, find a shady spot and have plenty of lemonade on hand.

For my family, many of the celebrations bring back vintage and childhood accessories that make the memories of first use the heart of the story. Whether it’s the nutcracker collection at Christmas, the ornaments that have unique associations or the carving set used for generations at Thanksgiving, those are the components that everyone remembers.

TO CELEBRATE MOTHER’S DAY, I’m departing from vintage and going with the idea of “*You Go Mom!*” as we lean into an ultra-sophisticated setting and a bold use of color. “Not your Grandmother’s Dining Room” is the order of the day.

For many of you, a selection of fine china might have been influenced by your mother, grandmother, mother-in-law-to-be or what was in vogue at the store where you registered. Tobacco Leaf by Mottahedeh is an original 1985 pattern based on

an 18th century Chinese pattern. The South was where tobacco crops were heavily cultivated, and this pattern shows it in beautiful pure colors. I didn’t have to look hard, not only in Augusta but also in my resources, to find the perfect dining room for this piece. My son, Cord Kilpatrick and his wife, Mary Margaret, have done a wonderful job transitioning a very traditional Charleston style home into a colorful haven for entertaining. What inspired me most was the original abstract painting by Greg Howard @greghowardart. It complimented this iconic china pattern that Keith Winkler from Replacements Ltd and I both loved. Keith took the lead from there with the Vietri Contessa stemware, Gold Iconic flatware by Wallace Silver and the exquisite Toscane





charger plate by Ceralene. I swooped in with monogram napkins (a sure indicator you are in the South.)

In terms of Mother’s Day, I think capturing what Mom or Grandmother loves is the key. In this instance, I was able to introduce Mary Margaret to an entirely new look for her table. She loves to entertain and has such great style that you rarely see the same thing twice. I was thrilled that she liked the presentation. The flowers by Flowers on Broad truly touched every color and the addition of satin and velvet ribbon made it a genuine celebration. Since I am a collection nut and lover of all things vintage, the addition of the Coalport Florals place card holders was the perfect filler. Found at an estate sale of the late Dr. Bleakley Chandler, it’s one of many collections of Jane Chandler’s that interested me that day. Now that my granddaughters love to use them as well, I have found them on Replacements Ltd website and ordered more.

One pro tip that is part of my own etiquette history is that a fork does not go on top of a napkin unless it’s a picnic to keep the napkin from blowing away. The monogram chosen for this occasion was unique and a favorite of my monogrammer, Lauren Burnett. The nice thing about the placement of the monogram, is that it allows several ways to fold and have the inscription appropriately placed.

Most often placement of the goblets is dictated by the number of people seated but with only six place settings, we were able to use three stems. These Vietri Contessa goblets come in a variety of colors, and we had fun choosing three colors to spread between the water goblet, wine glass and champagne flute. I also challenged myself to move away from sterling silver and leaned on Keith for advice. He suggested Gold Iconic, and the handles were a perfect match with the table appointments and Mary Margaret’s chandelier.

To suggest a throwback from my bakery and mail-order days for part of this celebration was a quick "yes" and we chose the Strawberry Layer cake. For years, shipped as our Cake of the Month for May, it quickly became part of the regular menu. The cake made a name for itself in *O Magazine*, when Oprah put it on her O list and the rest was history. It was truly one of VeryVera's most beloved cakes and we are sharing the recipe with the hope that you will understand why. A gorgeous cut glass cake stand, Lenox vintage dessert plates, a bit of champagne, and a reason to toast Mom: It’s the perfect ending to Mom's special day.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING YOUR PARTY

What stands the test of time?

- Sentimental journeys
- Celebrations with those you love
- Items that have deep roots for your family

What’s hidden in the South?

- Collections that are under beds and the tops of closets
- Sophisticated style that rivals Palm Beach or Miami
- Creativity with items found in packed-up boxes or trunks

Search **replacementsltd.com** for all your china, crystal, and silver needs. A beautiful selection of paper goods can be found @ **kmccall.com**



VERYVERA'S STRAWBERRY LAYER CAKE

Serves: 20 to 24 (¾” or 1” slices) • Prep Time: 30 to 45 minutes • Bake Time: 28 to 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE CAKE

- Floured baking spray
- 1 (8 ounce) package frozen sliced strawberries with sugar added, thawed
- 4 cups Betty Crocker® white cake mix*
- 3 ounces strawberry Jell-O® mix
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup whole milk, at room temperature
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour

* This will require two boxes of cake mix

FOR THE ICING

- 1 stick unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 16 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
- ½ teaspoon strawberry extract
- 2 lbs confectioners’ sugar
- 6 drops red food coloring

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Grease and flour three 9-inch pans lined with parchment paper.
 2. Place the thawed strawberries in a food processor and pulse to puree. Measure ½ cup to use for this recipe and freeze the rest for the next time you make this cake.
 3. Combine the cake mix and the Jell-O® mix with a rubber spatula.
 4. Add the ½ cup of strawberry puree, eggs, and oil and mix until well blended.
 5. Add the milk to the Jell-O® mixture and beat vigorously for 2 minutes.
 6. Add the flour and mix, just until the batter is smooth.
 7. Divide the batter evenly between the three prepared pans. Tap the pans on the counter to ensure there are no air bubbles.
 8. Bake for 28 to 30 minutes. Test doneness by touching a cake top. If it springs back, it is done. If the indentation stays, it needs 2 to 3 minutes longer. If needed, use a wooden skewer.
 9. Cool the cakes for at least 10 minutes on a cooling rack before removing from the pans.
-
1. Cream the butter and cream cheese in the bowl of a stand mixer for 3 minutes. At the end of the 3 minutes, scrape the bowl extremely well.
 2. Add the strawberry extract and beat for 1 to 2 minutes.
 3. Slowly add the confectioners’ sugar, beating on low to ensure the sugar does not fly out of the mixing bowl.
 4. After each addition of confectioners’ sugar, scrape the bottom of the bowl extremely well.
 5. Once all the confectioners' sugar is incorporated, add the red food coloring and beat on low for 3 minutes.
 6. Spread icing between the cake layers and then on the top and sides of the stacked layers.