

Rachel De Marte's Valentine's Day

The owner of Rachel De Marte, Plan Style Party shares tips for the ultimate V-Day soiree.

Having worked with some of the city's top event planners, Rachel De Marte is a familiar name (and face) to those on the Chicago party scene. Last September De Marte struck out on her own with **Rachel De Marte, Plan Style Party**, an ultra-hip event planning company that puts a heavy focus on unique food and beverage options and styling. We asked De Marte what she's serving this Valentine's Day, and how she's setting the table.

STEP 1: Food.

Since it's the holiday of love, De Marte is all about the aphrodisiacs. "Honey, asparagus, arugula, oysters, garlic, basil, pine nuts, truffles, fennel, mustard, blackberries—there are so many," she enthuses. "You can easily plan a three-course or more meal using these ingredients." For her own celebration, De Marte is crafting a six-course aphrodisiac tasting menu that's "chock full of sexy food and beverage pairings, properly named something seductively funny," she says.

First Course: "Under the Sea" - Oysters (with horseradish, mignonette, hot sauce, and lemon); Brut Rosé Champagne

Second Course: "Chasing Tail" - Espresso and coriander spiced shrimp, phyllo nest, and special sauce; Chenin Blanc

Third Course: "Rock It Salad" - Arugula and fennel salad with shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano, and lemon dressing; Pouilly-Fuissé

Fourth Course: "Italian Lovers Lane" - Asparagus, white truffle and pine nut risotto, and opal basil; Pouilly-Fumé or Chablis

Fifth Course: "Stuck on You" - Pesto-crusted lamb chops; Cabernet Sauvignon

Sixth Course: "Love Bomb" - Chocolate mousse filling, raspberry sauce; Woodford Reserve Bourbon



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STEP 2: Drinks.

De Marte suggests mixing up an aphrodisiac cocktail, too. If you're hosting a large group rather than a one-on-one date, package the cocktail's ingredients into a styled box to send home with each guest as a party favor. "Pull from the aphrodisiac list and create a cocktail that fits perfectly with the theme of the party or menu," De Marte says. Her concoction is dubbed Bruised Bottom.



STEP 3: Styling.

Of course, pretty place settings help set the mood. De Marte uses a mix of red and white elements for a Valentines-themed tablescape: white linen, red chairs, red Chinese lanterns, and red florals, for instance. "Alternatively, pink sparkly linen, silver charger plates, and patterned China work well with giant gold 'X' and 'O' balloons and gold confetti," De Marte says. She also suggests making a game for guests when they find their seats. "At each place setting, place a name card with one of the aphrodisiacs from the menu on it, and what makes it an aphrodisiac," she says. De Marte suggests Phil Collins, "Easy Lover" as background music.