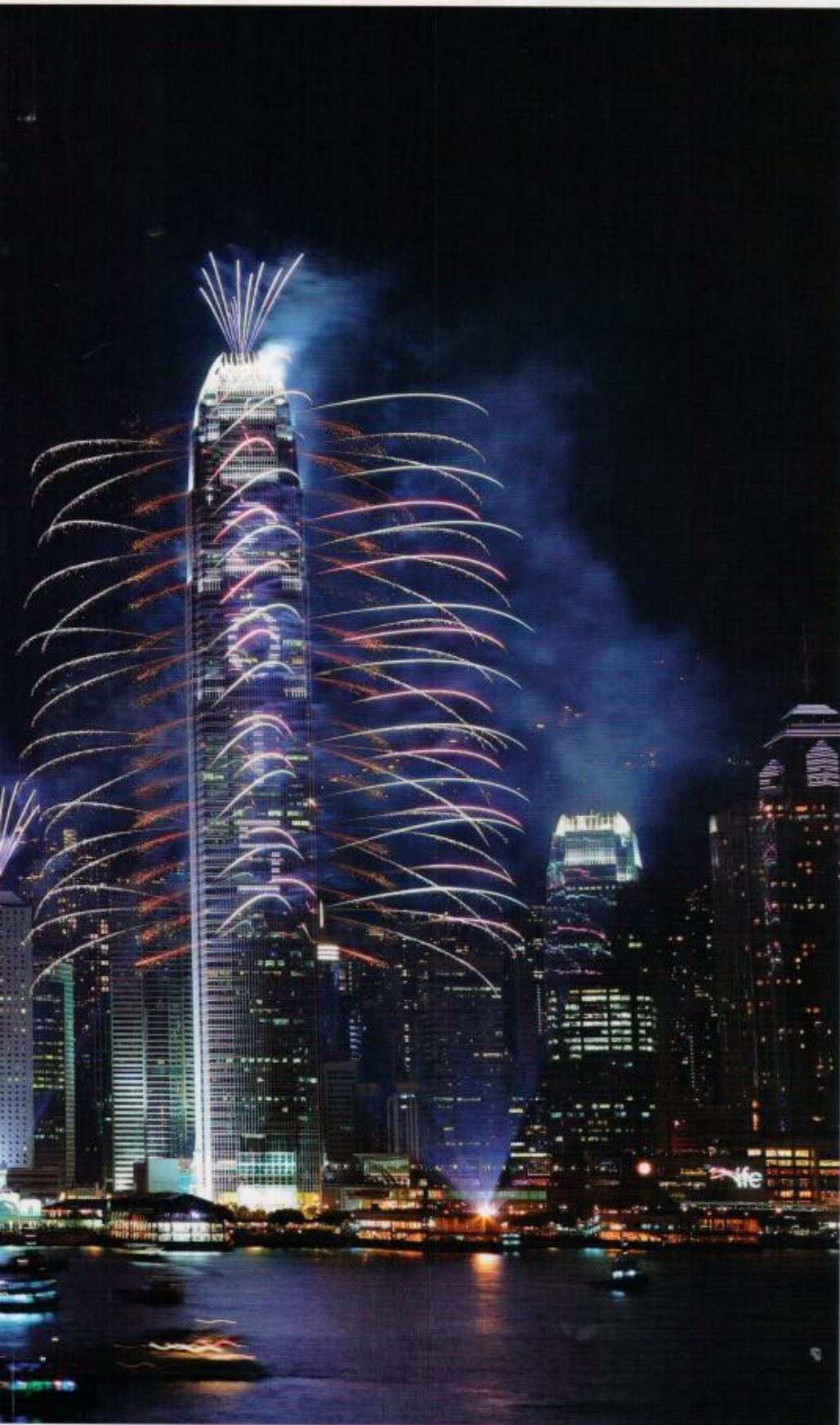


party on

Make merry

How to throw a New Year's Eve party. By Adele Brunner.





Your midnight countdown may not be as impressive as the harbour's, but make it memorable.

Anyone even thinking about throwing a New Year's Eve party deserves a gold star. Built up to be one of the most momentous nights of the year but notoriously anti-climactic, December 31 can strike fear into the hearts of all but the most confident hosts.

Planning is key. Give yourself as much lead time as possible to book caterers and get invitations out early via websites or email (try Paperless Post or Evite). Set an RSVP deadline and call anyone who hasn't replied on time to secure numbers. People can be hesitant to commit to New Year's Eve, but if you're pulling out the stops the last thing you'll want is to have half your guests not show up.

While it's never too early to start planning, start the party later than normal. Former event planner Chincia Harvey recommends a 9pm-9.30pm start, anticipating most guests will arrive by 10pm.

"Hong Kong is a busy city – busy work life, busy lifestyle. On big celebration dates, such as New Year's Eve, people rarely arrange one meeting in the evening," she says. "Starting your party a little later may stop the 'early birds' using your party as the first destination before moving on."

This will also ensure revelries are still in full swing at midnight. Once the party is started, the secrets to success include food, drink, decorations and music, according to event planner Lauren Roberts, founder of bespoke party planner Sweet Soirées.

Food

When it comes to F&B, Roberts believes having too much is better than not enough. She calculates eight to 12 canapés, depending on size, and one bottle of wine per person.

"A low supply or mediocre selection of food and drink can make guests feel unsatisfied and lead to them leaving early, which is not a good sign. Some people will have more and some less, but it usually evens out and if you have a bit extra left over at the end of the event, then you know your guests were well taken care of," she says.

Harvey's rule of thumb is 2.5 glasses per hour per person, but use your common sense according to your friends' typical consumption. She also suggests feeding guests for the first



A candlelit table setting by Sweet Soirees.

two hours to ensure they make it to midnight.

Caterers make life much easier – try Gingers, Jaspas, Delicious, Relish Kitchen and Shamrock – but good supermarkets such as Fusion, Marks & Spencer and City'Super also stock frozen canapés and other yummy treats at this time of year. Alternatively arm yourself

with a spreadsheet and organise a potluck supper with your guests contributing a dish each. Most people have Christmas leftovers.

Drinks

Wine merchants such as Essential Fine Wines offer sale or return, refunding the cost of any

unopened bottles. It also loans free glasses to hosts purchasing its wines (delivery charge \$250). Boutique Wines offers a similar service, plus free delivery on orders over \$1,000 and boasts the largest range of champagne in Hong Kong. However, Roberts feels it is perfectly acceptable to ask all your guests to bring a bottle of champagne.

"Most guests are happy to bring a bottle, so why not ask them to bring something extra special for a special occasion? What's a New Year's Eve without a good supply of champagne?" she says.

Wilfred Catering rents glasses, tableware, equipment such as chafing dishes and even tables without requiring you to book its catering services (minimum charges apply). For small parties, consider buying inexpensive glassware from Ikea.

If you don't want to spend your entire evening pouring drinks, get your guests to help themselves to drinks from a table or bar. Supply laminated printouts of Champagne cocktail recipes (available on websites such



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as Martha Stewart, BBC Food and Allrecipes), bottles of bubbles and relevant ingredients, and invite your guests to get mixing. Failing that, most neighbourhood teenagers would jump at the chance to earn a bit of pocket money by serving drinks. And don't forget to supply lots of ice.

"Ice can be difficult to get in this city," Harvey warns. "Have a plan of how much you're going to buy and who will pick it up. I've been to many parties where the host is struggling to find extra bags in supermarkets."

Decorations

It doesn't cost a fortune to make your home look special for New Year's Eve. Most of us put up decorations at Christmas, but deck your halls with extra fairy lights, tea candles and a glitter ball to set the party mood.

"My decoration trends for Christmas 2014 are big, metallics, gold and silver," says stylist and interior designer Anji Connell. "Less is more: use a few outsized items to make an impact. And take care with lighting. Your main party room should be not too light or too dark; candles and lamps rather than overhead

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lighting set the mood. Arrange a smoking area and make it known. Also, designate somewhere out of sight for coats and bags – it pains me to see a beautifully decorated room piled up with bags and coats."

If you're feeling creative, there are lots of ideas on Buzzfeed (www.buzzfeed.com/peggy/51-diy-ways-to-throw-the-best-new-years-party-eve) from large cardboard numbers of the year wrapped in tinsel to spray painting wine glass stems in gold or silver.

Themes are a good idea, especially if you're entertaining people from different friendship groups. It is a great ice breaker, Harvey says, to get people mingling and can help with decoration ideas.

Roberts agrees. "I love party themes, whether it is an all-out movie, place or genre

theme or a simple colour theme. The best themes are creative but not too complicated. Sparkle and Famous People of the Year work well for a New Year's Eve party."

Other party considerations include safeguarding your home. Caroline Basham, who offers a bespoke personal assistance service for families and individuals, says water features such as swimming pools are the biggest health and safety risk, with fire caused by candles coming a close second. (Invest in accessible fire extinguishers.)

"Use plastic cups if allowing guests onto a balcony and put out ample ashtrays so cigarettes aren't thrown onto floors below. If you're allowing glassware on balconies, make sure you have insurance. And create a spillage kit for red wine including salt, soda water and a bucket or towel to put over the stained area so guests avoid it," she says.

Music

Music can make or break a party, Roberts says. "A great way to make sure people dance is to hire a DJ," she says. "They will take care of everything for you and make sure the tunes



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you want keep playing. If this is a bit too much, Spotify is a dream. Browse its endless party playlists or create your own."

When you send out invitations, ask your guests to list their top three party tunes and make a compilation of their choices.

Happy New Year!

Naturally, a December 31 party is all about ringing in the New Year.

"I love a well-prepared countdown," Roberts says. "Place a big clock where everyone can see it and make sure everyone has champagne and a handful of confetti ready to throw when the clock strikes 12."

Another idea is to number 10 balloons and pop one a second leading to midnight. Most of all, don't forget to have fun.

"Don't be a stressed-out host," Harvey says. "You don't want to ruin the mood of the party with your own negative energy. The best way to ensure your guests relax and have fun is to lead by example."

So stop worrying about whether everyone is enjoying themselves, pour yourself a drink and let the good times roll. **S**



Do's and don'ts

Tips from party experts Lauren Roberts and Chincia Harvey.

- Do make sure you have enough alcohol but that it is not flowing too freely too early. There's nothing worse than having guests pass out before midnight.
- Don't forget about your neighbours. Let them know you are having a party and keep them in mind after 1am.
- Do get friendly with Excel. It's a great way to track numbers, list decoration items and stay on top of your budget.
- Don't forget to charge your camera/phone so you can take lots of photos of your great party.
- Do delegate, delegate, delegate. Ask a

music-loving friend to compile a playlist, for example.

- Do as much as possible before the day of the party. Hours fly by when you're setting up. Give yourself an extra day to sort everything out.
- Do keep a list of taxi numbers ready for the end of the night.

Little Black Book

- Anji Connell: www.anjiconnellinteriordesign.com.
 Boutique Wines: 2872 4234, www.boutiquewines.com.hk.
 Caroline Basham: www.caroline-b.com.hk.
 Delicious: 2559 0144, www.delicious-hk.com.
 Essential Fine Wines: 3679 3200, www.efw.com.hk.
 Gingers: 2964 9160, www.gingers.com.hk.
 Relish Kitchen: 3481 1924, www.relish-kitchen.com.
 Shamrock: 2547 8155, www.shamrock.com.hk.
 Sweet Soirées: 2818 5870, www.sweetsoireeshk.com.
 Wilfred Catering: 2870 0535, www.catering.com.hk.

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