

GRAND TOUR

Tablescapes

ZEN AND THE ART OF DINING



By Deborah Fabricant

AFTER OD-ING DURING THE HOLIDAYS on the likes of Molten Chocolate Cake with Peppermint Flakes, Cornmeal Gnocchi with Truffle Butter and carloads of See's Candy, methinks it is time to level out for the New Year and practice restraint in my eating habits. Zen out, if you will. Eat less, embrace simplicity, cool my jets, pare down.

The Asian Culture has the right idea, and that is to KISS ... Keep It Simple, Stupid! Lighter food and less "fluff" on the table really appeals to me this time of year. We all have a tendency to go overboard around the Holidays, with all the parties and all the parties and all the parties, right? So, first of all, let's get real about our diet, livers and nutrition, okay? Beginning today I will eat only what's good for me, and that's vegetables, fruits, lean meat, poultry sans skin and lots of fish. I will say goodbye to the high fat, high calorie foods that I so gleefully

consumed during the month between Thanksgiving and Christmas and will return to a simple way of eating. Now don't get me wrong, I will continue to enjoy food and all that goes with it, including dinner parties, friends over for impromptu gatherings and beautiful tablescapes. It just has to be simple and healthful for a change.

So, how do we accomplish this? Beautiful entertaining with the desire to lose a few pounds, simple cooking, elegant meals and heart-stopping tablescapes? Stay with me, people, stay with me! It all starts with an eye for true simplicity, so this month we're going to create a sensual, Zen-like table along with some culinary suggestions for easy and light food that's beautiful to look at and to taste.

After all the glitter and glamour of party-hopping, why not opt for a serene dinner table for your next gathering? This is an

easy way to add elegance and beauty to a dinner party without going to a great deal of trouble. This is what you'll need:

- A length of red silk fabric, long enough to drape over each end of your dining table, going almost to the floor.
- Bamboo placemats
- Square black Asian-style chargers
- Square white plates
- Red silk napkins
- Chinese-inspired tassels to use as napkin rings
- Black sake vessels and cups
- Chopsticks and holders

For the Centerpiece you'll need:

- 3 round black vases (or cover round vases with black fabric or paper)
- Exotic pods and green persimmons on branches. Or use Lucky Bamboo and red chilies
- Flat, green moss
- Asian-inspired candles
- Any Asian-inspired art pieces, sculptures or figurines. If you want to get really creative, hang a colorful Kimono on the wall of your dining room, fill ceramic or stone vases with cattail reeds and light votive candles everywhere.

Now, for some food ideas that are simple, lean and delicious:

- Put scallops in an ovenproof dish, top with a julienne of leeks, drizzle with a little light soy sauce, some mirin and

a few drops of oriental sesame oil. Cover tightly with aluminum foil and bake in a hot oven for 6-8 minutes.

- Marinate boned lamb for a couple of hours in a mixture of natural yogurt, chopped mint, garlic, olive oil, lemon juice, freshly ground pepper and sea salt before grilling or roasting.
- Grill large flat mushroom caps with blue cheese scattered on top and season with freshly ground pepper. Serve with a green salad and crusty bread.
- Toss tangelo and pink grapefruit slices with crisp jicama and diced pineapple in a dressing made with fish sauce*, tamarind concentrate*, sugar, sliced red chili and fresh lime juice. (* available at Asian markets)
- Make a salad with delicious ruby-colored seeds of pomegranate, sliced pears and apples, toasted walnuts and mesclun or Belgian endive. Dress with lemon juice and walnut oil.

Design and food for 2005 doesn't have to be stuffy or fattening. My resolution is to cook healthy, eat healthy and be healthy for the New Year. I hope yours will be, too. Happy New Year to you all! **GT**

Deborah Fabricant is a lifestyle entertaining consultant, cookbook author, writer and lecturer. She has appeared on national TV lifestyle programs. She serves as Media Spokesperson for a number of companies and recently launched her new syndicated column, "Dishing With Deb."



Sometimes the house tour never makes it past the garage.



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