

Behind the Bash: A Devilish Affair

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College football and birthday season collide head-on for an Arizona State University themed celebration that would make Sparky proud.

INVITATION: Invites were designed by The Paper Place and feature a youthful cutout of the birthday girl showing of her school spirit. A few dozen extra doubled as easy, inexpensive centerpieces.

VENUE: The festivities were held in the main dining room at Christopher's Restaurant & Crush Lounge at Biltmore Fashion Park, a favorite of the birthday girl. Open, airy and elegant, it was the perfect locale for surprising the guest of honor, who had an unobstructed view of her friends and family as she walked into the surprise of a lifetime. If your guest list exceeds 30, or you're a hands-of sort of host, throw the party away from home to lighten the pre- and post-party workload. Not only does this eliminate set-up and tear down, no one has to stick around to do the dishes. Consider delegating responsibilities to several gung-ho partygoers well in advance. Most guests will be happy to lend a hand and will love being included in planning the special celebration.

CUISINE: Guests were in good hands with James Beard Award winner Chef Christopher Gross at the helm. The menu featured a delicate arugula salad garnished with heirloom tomatoes, pan-seared scallops or beef and, for dessert, a decadent chocolate mousse tower.

DÉCOR: Each place setting included a napkin embroidered with the ASU pitchfork and a wine glass adorned with maroon and gold ribbons. Rhinestones with adhesive peel-and-stick backs were added for a little extra bling. Conveniently, the wine itself, selected by Christopher's world-renowned sommelier, matched the bash's collegiate color scheme.

ATTIRE No black ties here. Guests were encouraged to wear ASU gear in honor of the birthday girl's favorite team. By the time everyone arrived, the dining room was abundant in maroon and gold. **SURPRISE,**

SURPRISE: Throwing a seamless surprise party is no small feat. The success of this well-orchestrated event can be attributed to several things, including timing. Have guests arrive 30 minutes before you truly need them in order to prevent the chronically late from ruining the surprise. The short lull before party time is the perfect opportunity for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres and will naturally elevate the level of excitement.