

At Home for the Holidays

WHAT BETTER WAY TO SHARE THE SPIRIT OF THE SEASON THAN BY INVITING FRIENDS TO DROP BY FOR FOOD, DRINK AND FELLOWSHIP? ALL YOU NEED IS AN OPEN HOUSE AND A FEW FRESH IDEAS BY WALTER NICHOLLS

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e might as well begin where this whole affair is going to end up: at your front door.

A wreath is nice, but when you're opening your house to 25, or 50, or hundreds of your friends for three to five hours, it's not enough. Take a tip from chef Henry Dinardo, owner of Windows Catering Co.: Now is a great time to buy a pretty new doormat. Take another from caterer Susan Gage: Arrange to post someone at your door for the duration of the party. It could be your mother, your brother, your

father, your sister, your child—even a neighborhood kid you pay \$5 an hour. Just get someone.

The point isn't to keep strangers out, though in these times we suppose that's an added benefit. The point is to spare your guests the awkwardness of wandering through the halls, helloing wanly while they worry they've got the wrong address. The point is to have someone greet them and show them the way to the coat closet (you've cleared one and stocked it with hangers, of course) or the coat rack (which you've rented because you don't have an empty closet but you know how ridiculous it feels to go burrowing through a mound of damp wool on somebody's else's bed).

The point—the whole point of entertaining—is to make your friends feel welcome and comfortable. Few social occasions can do that so well for so many as the open house. So, pick a few hours sometime between Thanksgiving and New Year's; decide whether you're doing just appetizers or just desserts,



or going for a full buffet; and extend the invitations. (Today may not be a moment too soon, as they should go out three or four weeks in advance.) Then you can hire a caterer. Or you can do the work yourself, capitalizing on the holiday spirit of the caterers who answered our call for help by sharing their recipes and expertise on open houses with us.

Oh, one more word about your front door: Dinardo suggests propping a golf umbrella there. While everyone is feeling so warm inside, it just may start to rain or snow outside. Of course, you or your greeter will want to walk people to their cars when it's time to say goodbye.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN DUGDALE

Food styling by Donna Whatley Production assistance by Mary Rust