

A Perfect Little Picnic

Susan Gage Caterers in Oxon Hill is known for its creative and graceful presentations that also taste great. Executive chef Joe Beck and owner Gage decided to start with a white, glazed, open-weave ceramic basket lined with a crisp red and white striped napkin, both purchased at Crate & Barrel.

"First we thought of using stunning china, but that was too logical," said Gage. "So we decided to give people a different option—a personal picnic basket, perfect for Valentine's Day."

Beck began by cutting the bird in half and removing the backbone. The breast and legs were separated. "That way I can pack them closely together," he said.

Gage folded a sheet of parchment paper into an envelope large enough to hold all of the chicken pieces. The

packet was then secured with a length of raffia, finished in a neat bow. Said Gage: "This will keep the napkin clean and also make it picnic-y."

They put the takeout broccoli florets into a hollowed-out red bell pepper (their addition) and sprinkled them with a Champagne vinaigrette. But where were the carrots? "We choose to hide the carrots [inside the bell pepper] because the orange and red don't go together," said Gage.

They spooned the mashed potatoes into a leaf-shaped, ceramic serving piece. A heart-shaped cookie cutter was used to form a well in the center for the gravy. Nice touch. That same cookie cutter then transformed the biscuit into a heart. Into the basket it all went. The cranberry relish went into a small ramekin on the side.

—Walter Nicholls



BY RENEE COMET—THE WASHINGTON POST

At Susan Gage Caterers, executive chef Joe Beck spooned the potatoes into a leaf-shaped dish. A heart-shaped cookie cutter was used to form a well for the gravy.