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By Erik R. Trinidad | August 7, 2012

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Want to really give your friends something to talk about? Host a pop-up dinner party. A pop-up dinner party combines one part culinary skill, one part creativity, and one part spontaneity—all of which harmonize into a memorable and entertaining evening. However, while a pop-up dinner party may appear to be a fanciful spur-of-the-moment engagement, you should know that a lot of planning and preparation goes into it, way before the *amuse-bouche* is served.

“The spontaneity is an illusion in most regards,” says Michael J. Cirino, co-founder of **A Razor, A Shiny Knife**, a theatrically inclined troupe of “culinary entertainers” who are more than mere caterers. Having been one of the creators and hosts of one of the most publicized, seemingly spontaneous stunts of culinary entertainment in New York City— staging a six-course luncheon on a public subway train—he’s become quite the expert on pop-up parties, from being a purveyor of the culinary experience to planning out every aspect

behind the scenes.

In fact, the hour-long subway party took three months of preparation—figuring out all the logistics of creating makeshift tables, transporting dinnerware, staffing the event, and promoting it with video and a PR campaign—not to mention the hundred-odd man-hours to prepare and cook the food.



Think big, but start small

Staging a gourmet six-course meal on a public mass transit system may seem a bit ambitious for your first dinner party, so start with a smaller pop-up dinner party idea.

“Know your talents and stay within your talents,” Cirino suggests. “If you can make unbelievable lasagna, have a lasagna party, because A) you know it’s going to be delicious, B) you can be proud of it, and C) you can get people involved in the making process.” Cirino believes in getting his guests involved with the actual food preparation process, not just helping the chef with the chopping of vegetables or the kneading of dough, but also breaking the ice among guests so they can learn about the craft of cooking and engage in conversation with one another.

Stay within your space

“Know the limitations of your space,” Cirino advises. “You might want to have a dinner party for 25, but if you have a small apartment...you’re not going to be able to do that. Know that your kitchen is only so big, and you want your guests to be having a good time—you want yourself to be having a good time—so that balance needs to be thought about ahead of time.” Of course, it should go without saying that if you have a huge room or yard that can hold a hundred people, don’t feel you have to invite that many until you’re ready for it.

Figure out guest compatibility

“You should also think about who you’re inviting,” Cirino recommends. “Are the people going to be compatible? Are you excited about introducing new people to each other?” Knowing which guest blends with another in terms of personality is almost as important as figuring out which ingredient goes well with another in a recipe. After all, one guest can make or break a dinner party experience, and you want everyone to be having a good time.

Eat before the party

So much work for a unique pop-up dinner party goes into the preparation before guests arrive—as well as in playing host when they do—that you may not even have time to eat yourself. “Most of the time, you’re so busy doing last-minute chopping, you’re not going to eat yourself, and you’re going to have two glasses of wine and you’re going to get too drunk and have a headache,” Cirino says. You need to keep your mind sharp—not only to use a knife, but also to make judgment calls during the party. As a responsible host, “You’re the one that’s creating the experience and you’re the one that’s going to be shepherding the people through it,” Cirino says.

In the end, you’ll be proud of what you accomplished, and you’ll give your friends something to talk about—making everyone who did not attend feel envious. Above all, you should enjoy yourself, and make it a labor of love. “If you as the host don’t enjoy what you’re doing, it’s going to become a chore for you,” says Cirino. “And once it becomes a chore, it becomes work.”

Want to know more about Michael J. Cirino? Check out his blog at www.arazor.tumblr.com, friend him on Facebook/[arazorashinyknife](https://www.facebook.com/arazorashinyknife) or follow him on Twitter [@ashinyknife](https://twitter.com/ashinyknife).

Erik Trinidad is an author, writer, designer, food critic, world traveler, and all-around “Freelance Renaissance Man,” whose work can be seen on *The Huffington Post*, *Food Network/Cooking Channel*, and *Discovery.com*, as well as on his own travel and food sites, *The Global Trip* and *Fancy Fast Food*. Follow him on Twitter [@theglobaltrip](https://twitter.com/theglobaltrip) and [@fancyfastfood](https://twitter.com/fancyfastfood); on [facebook.com/theglobaltrip](https://www.facebook.com/theglobaltrip) and [facebook.com/fancyfastfood](https://www.facebook.com/fancyfastfood); [youtube.com/theglobaltrip](https://www.youtube.com/theglobaltrip) and [youtube.com/fancyfastfood](https://www.youtube.com/fancyfastfood) and at “[theglobaltrip](https://www.instagram.com/theglobaltrip)” on Instagram.

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