

# Event Planning

---

## Planning and Conducting Dinners

It is an indisputable fact that the degree of success of a bailliage is directly related to the quality of its dinners and other sponsored Chaîne events. As a rule, the highlight of the year is the Induction Dinner/Gala. However, many other types of functions are appropriate and enjoyed by members. These include formal and informal dinners at restaurants, buffets, wine tastings, picnics, less formal ethnic dinners, formal and informal dinners in members' homes, visits and tours of culinary and wine establishments, cooking classes, barbecues, et cetera. The key to a successful function is, of course, proper planning, proper promotion, proper execution and member participation.

Some aspects to be considered in the realization of a successful event are as follows:

- Dinner location
- Theme
- Wine pairing with the foods chosen
- Menu Planning
- Invitations
- Entertainment (e.g., musicians)
- Décor (including centerpieces)
- Cigars and digestifs (optional)
- Favors (optional)
- Accommodations for Inducting Officer
- Photographer

When possible, it is desirable to involve a wide segment of the membership in the planning and execution of local events. This involvement helps identify and train future leaders, and creates loyalty, pride and an understanding of the complexities of staging a Chaîne event.

## Basic Rules for Dinners

At a Chaîne Dinner, except at the most informal functions, the following rules should be observed:

1. Smoking is absolutely prohibited until after coffee is served. This applies to the reception and usually even at outdoor events as well. Guests who desire to smoke are invited to retire to a designated area outside of the dining or reception area.
2. Water is served only upon request, and with the evolution of the strict driving/drinking laws, guests are encouraged to request water. However, to conform to tradition, water will not served unless requested.
3. Speeches are not permitted at Chaîne functions (except during the Induction Ceremony.) Short commentaries on food and wine, however, are appropriate, interesting and educational. The service staff should be instructed in advance to continue serving when narrations are underway. On the other hand, entertainment must cease during commentaries.
4. Hot courses should be eaten when served as this is the moment when the food should be at its optimum quality.

## **Guide for Dinner Planning**

**Menu Planning** - If your bailliage or the host establishment has selected a theme, this will determine the type of food served. It is common practice to request that the chef propose a menu which can then be considered by the bailliage. The chef may wish to suggest wines, or the wine selection may be handled by the bailliage. If the bailliage has its own wine cellar, some or all of the wines may be selected from the cellar.

It is generally the responsibility of the Vice Conseiller Gastronomique and/or Dinner Chairman, in coordination with the Vice Conseiller Culinaire, to approve the menu and wines, although wine coordination is sometimes the responsibility of the Vice Echanson or Wine Committee chairman.

Pitfalls to avoid in selecting a menu and wines include:

- having a theme similar to one recently used
- duplicating flavors, textures and presentation styles within courses or from course to course
- selecting untried wines
- selecting wines which may prove unavailable

**Tasting Dinner** - It is often advisable to schedule a tasting dinner in order to try out the menu and wines and to see if any changes should be made based on the bailliaiges knowledge of the expectations of its membership. The test dinner should be scheduled sufficiently in advance of the event itself so that changes can be made and should include those most intimately involved with its planning. Having each participant make notes course by course can be helpful in arriving at a clear consensus and/or modifications to be considered/suggested.

**Reception** - The Reception, thirty to forty-five minutes in length, is an opportunity to develop a convivial atmosphere for the evening. It allows the members to get reacquainted and provides an opportunity to acquaint guests with the members. Unless the theme dictates otherwise, elegant hors d'oeuvres are usually accompanied by Champagne and white wine.

**Event invitations** - Informal events are often scheduled on shorter notice than formal events, but in any case, invitations should be mailed well ahead of time (no less than forty-five days). The invitation should include: date; times of reception, dinner and induction (if scheduled); place; type of event; attire; whether or not decorations are to be worn; price for members and guests (if different); how payment should be made and to whom the check should be sent; deadline for a response; information about guests (if allowed); eating information (if pertinent). "Your check is your reservation" is the usual policy.

Invitations take many forms, the simplest of which is a letter from the Bailli. Creative, well-designed invitations are increasing in use and are well received.

**Reservation Procedures and Dinner Seating** - Reservation polices may be adopted to suit each bailliage's event. It should be specified if the event is for members only or if guests are permitted. Sometimes guests are permitted after a specified date if space is available. Your bailliage will want to decide if the fee for guests will be the same or greater than the fee for members and will you need to determine if moneys are to be collected in advance to guarantee a reservation. The latter is strongly advocated.

In the case of last minute cancellations, moneys are usually not refunded unless replacements attend because the bailliage must pay the host establishment for a guaranteed number of attendees whether or not they actually attend.

The Bailli customarily handles seating but may delegate this task to others involved with the event. Bailliages should encourage fraternization among all members by rotating seating assignments rather than allowing members to indicate their own seating preferences. This practice also facilitates a more rapid assimilation of the new members into a bailliage. Members accompanied by guests, however, should be seated with their guest.

**Room Arrangements, Seating and Table Decorations** - Round tables of six or eight are considered by many to offer the best opportunity for conversation and service. Tables of four should generally be avoided if possible. A single long table, a U-shape, multiple long tables positioned like spokes in a wheel or any other creative configuration is also appropriate. Dias seating of the officers is not recommended. Assigned seating is always recommended at Chaîne events with the possible exception of casual ones.

The changing of seating assignments at a suitable time during the evening can provide interest, especially when many guests are present, or at joint events to promote the mixing of members and guests from other bailliages.

Flowers or other decorations should be either below or above the line of sight to facilitate optimal interaction.

**Wine Service** - The Wine Chairman should establish a wine menu as soon as the dinner menu is set and should be sure there is an adequate quantity for each course (Bailliages should keep records to determine the quantity of the wine their membership consumes).

Care should be used to avoid wasting wine. Carrying volumes of unconsumed wine away from the table for disposal is unfortunate and can be avoided, to some extent, if the staff communicates with the guests concerning wine service and glass removal. Staff should always ask before refilling wine glasses after the initial service and should always ask before removing any glasses containing wine (some guests like to retain their wines for subsequent comparison tastings). Waiters should be instructed to pour no more than four ounces at the initial service, regardless of the size of the glass.

**Instructions to the Wait-Staff** - Chaîne policies are designed to effect orderly food and wine service. As some of these policies may contradict the usual restaurant services practices, they should be discussed with the management and staff before the dinner takes place.

- Concurrent service is the ideal
- Staff should always ask before removing any glasses containing wine.
- Staff should always ask before refilling wine glasses after initial service.
- Service should be continued during wine and food commentaries.
- If there is a question about a guest being finished with a course, waiters should ask before a plate is removed. When it is determined that the last diner has finished eating all plates should be immediately removed.
- Staff should provide water when requested.
- Except at ethnic or other events at which custom would dictate otherwise, it is recommended that seasonings (such as salt and pepper) not be placed on the table, as Chefs take pride in properly seasoning their dishes.

- Wine and bread (if any) which accompanies a course should be served before the food is placed on the table.

**Menus** - Printed menus should be provided whenever possible. They convey information about the event, provide a written record for the Bailliage and individuals in attendance and set Chaîne events apart from those of other organizations.

The following should be included in every Chaîne menu:

- Full name of the organization (Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, Bailliage des Etats-Unis)
- Name of the local Bailliage
- Date
- Name of establishment where the dinner is being held
- Complete menu (an English translation is helpful if the menu is in a foreign language)
- Complete listing of wines served, including vintages
- Important host establishment personnel (at least the Chef)

If possible, the following should be included as well:

- the Chaîne Seal
- rules of the Chaîne
- names of the Bailli Délégué and Bailli Provincial (whether present or not)
- national officers in attendance
- local officers whether present or not
- all those in attendance, including guests of honor
- inductees or members being elevated (if applicable)

Information about the food and wines and/or about the event theme is optional.

Take advantage of the many options available to achieve originality and diversity in your menus. For example, you may have a member who is good at original design and will create covers for your menus. Alternatively, reproduce art that is in the public domain on the cover. (You can safely assume that anything published 75 years ago or more is in the public domain.) The host establishment sometimes has covers they are pleased to have used. Also, formal menu covers with the Chaîne logo are available and can be ordered from the National Administrative Office.

Members can often be found who can generate menu copy electronically, thus making it possible to realize considerable savings. Specialty papers are proliferating and make an impact, as does the use of attractive typefaces that suit the occasion.

**Commentaries and Printed Information** - A short commentary about the food being served is often desirable, especially if extensive research has been done to plan the menu and to locate special ingredients. Such a commentary is usually presented by someone from the host establishment, the Vice Conseiller Gastronomique or the Vice Conseiller Culinaire and is scheduled between courses in such a way that it enhances the enjoyment of what is being served.

Commentary about the wines served is often given by a knowledgeable member or is shared by several members. In addition to commentary or in its place, bailliages sometimes include information about the food and wines as part of the printed menu.

**Accolades** - The staff responsible for preparing and serving the dinner should be invited into the dining room at the end of the evening (usually after the desert course is served) to be recognized and thanked. The Chef is usually asked to introduce the kitchen staff, and the Maître d' or Captain is asked to introduce the wait staff. In situations in which the Owner, General Manager, Food and Beverage Manager or others in management are present, they should be invited to come forward to join those being thanked. If deemed suitable for the occasion, the staff should be poured a glass of Champagne or wine and toasted after being introduced.



The Bailli or Dinner chairman should express the bailliage's appreciation and may elect to award presentation plates, plaques, certificates of merit, and/or gifts to the Chef and to other members of the staff. The National Administrative Office has Chaîne pewter plates and china plates available as well as preprinted certificates of merit. Alternately, bailliage's may have these items designed themselves. Gift ideas include a special bottle of wine, a book on a relevant subject or a gift which ties in with the theme of the dinner. Sometimes gifts are presented to members of the bailliage who have helped with the planning of the event.

**Publicity and Photographs** - Local publicity calls attention to a bailliage and its activities and can result in attracting new Members.

Tips on getting publicized locally include;

- learn what it takes to get good media coverage
- find a special reason the media should be interested in publicizing your event
- investigate media contacts your host establishment may have
- when suitable, invite people from the media to your events
- provide well written background information on the event ahead of time to make it easy for the person writing the story.

Good photographs are essential. If possible, the services of a professional photographer should be engaged; otherwise, find a member with the interest, some experience and adequate equipment.