

TakeOut

Local pros share tips on outdoor entertaining

By Jeanine Matlow

Charles Dunlap is known for hosting elaborate gatherings at his handsome Pleasant Ridge home. The interior designer and owner of Dunlap Design Group in Birmingham has been asked to consult with his clients on their events.

For alfresco parties, “you always need a contingency plan because the weather is a big question mark,” says Dunlap, who uses a tent in the dining section for sun protection or rain. His guests are well aware they’re in for a treat. “I like to bring luxury outside with linen napkins and linen tablecloths, and silver and crystal. It’s always so unexpected and decadent,” Dunlap says.

The right lighting is essential. “For the Summer Solstice party, we lit the ceiling of the tent with a yellow gel on the lens. It cast this golden glow at night,” says Dunlap, who relies on candlelight outside. He suggests letting the party evolve with different locations in and around the home. “I like to keep the party moving. Appetizers and cocktails can be outside, dinner in the dining room and desserts on the screened porch,” Dunlap says. “It’s good to keep guests from sitting too long in one place.”

He also recommends tapping your favorite restaurant to cater. Your theme should provide plenty of inspiration. “That’s the way to start with everything, even a small Italian dinner for six,” Dunlap says. “It makes you think about the right music and the perfect color palette.”

When hosting smaller gatherings,



Charles Dunlap



For alfresco parties, Charles Dunlap, owner of Dunlap Design Group in Birmingham, sets up a tent in the dining section for protection from sun and rain.