

tapas time

SMALL PLATES. DELICIOUS WINES. GOOD FRIENDS. HAVE WE GOT A PARTY FOR YOU.

by viviane bauquet farre photography by stephen schmitt

When it comes to eating and drinking, the Spanish have it right. At the end of the day, instead of heading to a restaurant for one big meal, they head to many restaurants for lots of little meals. The mini-dishes to which I'm referring, of course, are known as *tapas*, small bites served with a glass of sherry or wine. By now, these "little dishes of Spain" have gained popularity well beyond the Iberian border—plenty of Rockland restaurants serve small plates, and just like in Spain, locals find them a perfect way to eat and socialize.

Believe it or not, tapas can be a great way to entertain at home, too—especially for hostesses who find themselves serving up the same old dinner-party formula. This kind of get-together can be very spontaneous—last-minute invites, ready-made dishes, great wine. As for pulling your party together, no worries. We've got it all figured out.



Want an easy—and elegant—way to dress up your table? Place floating candles in dessert bowls.



Cookies served with warm chocolate, for dipping, is a perfect way to end your meal.

The thrill of a tapas party is that it's so laid-back. Make your party extra relaxed by serving your tapas on a large coffee table—your guests can kick off their shoes and gather on fluffy pillows strewn about the floor. A cozy set-up like this creates an easygoing mood, gets conversation flowing, and most importantly, keeps the food within everyone's reach. Just like your party, your planning should be laid-back, too. Here, a few ways to keep it simple.

THE PLAN: DON'T PLAN

- Call—or text—a few friends and see if they're free this coming Saturday.
- Decide whether you'd like to have people over for a quick bite or for a whole meal, so you'll know how much food to make.
- Plan on three or four tapas for a cocktail-type party and eight for a lunch or dinner.

EASY DOES IT

A tapas party should be effortless to put together, so I rely on finger foods that I can purchase ready-made: Stuffed olives, grilled artichokes, and fire-roasted *piquillo* peppers (Spanish sweet red peppers) make up at least half of my small plates. Then I prepare a few of my favorite appetizers to go along with them. A few guidelines.

- Serve three to four deli-style ingredients such as stuffed olives, grilled artichokes, marinated vegetables, roasted nuts, thin slices of ham like *Jamón Serrano* (dry-cured Spanish ham), or cheese with membrillo (a fabulously delicious quince paste).
- Prepare three to four appetizers of your own. They don't have to be traditional dishes—I try to create an assortment that is both colorful and diverse.
- Serve dishes that keep at room temperature, so they can stay on the table for long periods.

MIX, DON'T MATCH

Eating tapas is a very old tradition, some say going back to ancient times. So why not bring a bit of old-world grandeur to your party? Take those family heirloom serving pieces—the ones you rarely use—out of the closet and mix them with everyday tableware. Serve your tapas in a variety of dishes, mixing colorful plates with silver bowls and old-fashioned spoons. It'll make your table look more festive and your party feel special.

- To serve, divide each food into two plates—there should be two dishes of potato fries, for example, so that each guest can reach every food without too much trouble, no matter where she is sitting.
- Mix and match dishes and bowls for a wild and festive-looking spread.
- Create a beautiful flower arrangement as a centerpiece to pair with the colors of your favorite plates.

TAPAS HAVE A COLORFUL, IF humorous, history. Legends tell of caballeros sipping sherry after work and protecting their drinks from dust and flies with a tapa, or lid. This “lid” was a slice of ham, a piece of bread, even a little plate with a few olives. From this, we learn an important lesson: The tapas tradition was first born with the drink—not the food. Thus the beverages you serve at your party are as important as anything else on the table—and in my book, just as exciting. Use this occasion to introduce your friends to wonderful Spanish sherries and wines. On the following pages, you’ll find some of my favorite recommendations.



SUGGESTED MENU

- Spanish green olives stuffed with sun-dried tomatoes
- Roasted marcona almonds
- Grilled artichokes & piquillo peppers
- Golden & red beet salad with anise vinaigrette
- Blood orange & Valencia orange salad with olive vinaigrette
- Spinach tortilla (Spanish omelet)
- Oven fries with cumin & alioli
 - Manchego cheese with membrillo (quince paste)
- Spanish almond cookies served with hot dark-chocolate shots

To find these recipes and hands-on cooking demonstrations, go to foodandstyle.com.





SHERRY Dry sheries are most appropriate for tapas; they taste similar to white wine, but with more crisp, nutty flavor. Sherries can be bone-dry to mellow, and pale straw to deep gold in color. Serve it chilled in a small martini glass or a white wine glass. Or, serve sherry in your family heirloom crystal—a perfect excuse to take it out of the sideboard and give it a good polish.

WINES Sherry may be the preferred drink for tapas, but there's still a place for wine at your table. Offer a white and a red along with your small plates. Then serve Cava—Spain's famous bubbly—with dessert.



TRY THESE SHERRIES & WINES

SHERRY

LUSTAU, SOLERA RESERVA, LIGHT MANZANILLA SHERRY
 Papirusa, Spain; \$15
 Piermont Fine Wine & Spirits
 503 Piermont Ave.; 359-0700
It's light, delicate, and very dry.

LUSTAU, SOLERA RESERVA, DRY AMONTILLADO SHERRY
 Los Arcos, Spain; \$37
 Wine For All
 516 Route 303, Orangeburg; 680-9463
It has a tawny gold color. Nutty with a touch of sweetness. Dry finish.

WHITE

BODEGAS ERCAVIO-BLANCO,
 Más Que Vinos, Spain 2007; \$15
 Piermont Fine Wine & Spirits
 503 Piermont Ave.; 359-0700
Made with Airén grapes, it's deliciously light and refreshing.

RED

JUAN ROJO-TEMPRANILLO
 Toro, Spain 2004; \$22
 Piermont Fine Wine & Spirits
 503 Piermont Ave.; 359-0700
Cassis and blackberry notes with a hint of mocha.

BODEGA RENACER-PUNTO FINAL MALBEC RESERVA
 Mendoza, Argentina 2005; \$18
 The Liquor Outlet
 61 Rockland Center, Nanuet; 623-7827
Deep ruby color. Bold red fruit notes with a hint of spice. Complex, with a long finish.

CAVA

GERMAN GILBERT-CAVA RESERVE
 Spain; \$15
 Piermont Fine Wine & Spirits
 503 Piermont Ave.; 359-0700
Cava is the Spanish "Champagne." Crisp, delightfully light, and bubbly.



VIVIANE BAUQUET FARRE

The founder of foodandstyle.com, Viviane Bauquet Farre shares recipes, cooking secrets, and entertaining tips in cooking classes run out of her Piermont home. To join her, call 365-1599 or visit foodandstyle.com.

RM