



*Lights,
candles,*
LATKES!

Story and photography by Viviane Bauquet Farre

Piermont's renowned food blogger shows you how to throw an unforgettable Hanukkah dinner party.

Bite-size butternut squash and leek latkes add elegance — and an element of surprise — to a traditional Hanukkah meal.





HEIDI & ARTHUR
CHOCOLATIER

Send your guests home with Heidi & Arthur candy, and they'll remember your holiday party every time they take a bite.



Parmesan-fennel twists are an addictive finger food, and they look beautiful on a holiday table.

Last year I was invited to a Hanukkah dinner party. Being that I'm not Jewish, and that this isn't my holiday, it was a first for me. And what a beautiful celebration it was.

The hostess put together a magnificent table, with a menorah – surrounded by sumptuous flowers – as the centerpiece. She lit candles in honor of the oil that miraculously burned for eight straight days so many years ago, in Jerusalem's Holy Temple. And she read blessings. All the while, a helper hid in the kitchen frying potato latkes. As you'd expect, each batch disappeared as soon as it was served.

Traditional gift-giving, of course, was also part of the fun – my friend gave me, most appropriately, a colorful apron. But the most memorable part of the party was the warmth and joy that spilled over the table the entire evening. I felt privileged to take part in a new tradition and to be included in such an intimate celebration.

In fact, the gesture touched me so deeply that this year I decided to plan a Hanukkah

dinner party of my own. My gathering, though, would focus not so much on the religious aspects, but on the beauty of Hanukkah itself: candles flickering off a towering menorah, subtle centerpieces made up of wintery greens, white roses and blue hydrangea; and silver forks and spoons that shine like stars.

Are you planning a Hanukkah party this year? Here, I share my thinking on how to blend a little tradition with a lot of glamour and make this year's Festival of Lights your brightest one yet.

LOVE AND LATKES

If you've seen my blog at Foodandstyle.com, then you know my mission is to put a creative twist on local, seasonal ingredients whenever possible. Of course, if you're going to host a dinner party in honor of Hanukkah, the menu must include one dish: latkes.

Made of fried shredded potatoes, these "pancakes" are traditionally served hot,

crisp and golden alongside sour cream or apple sauce. Often, they are a main course at a sit-down meal.

I wanted to honor the latkes tradition, but I also wanted to give my guests something unexpected. So, I scratched the sit-down dinner. I envisioned a party with lots of mingling, and to encourage this, I planned a menu of elegant finger foods, including bite-sized latkes. This way, I could invite as many people as I'd like, without being limited by the seating around my table. (Incidentally, latkes work well for this kind of setup: I could fry them before my guests arrive and warm them in the oven as needed.)

Potato latkes would certainly have a place on my menu – but with a gourmet twist. Instead of onions I'd make them with shallots and I'd serve them with apple confit and crispy sage. The apples pick up on the sweetness of the shallots, and the sage adds beautiful herbal notes. By dressing up this dish, I would offer a sense of tradition, and yet still add something special to it.



Menu

- Mixed olives and sesame crusted almonds
- Parmesan-fennel twists
- Potato latkes with apple confit and crispy sage
- Butternut squash and leek latkes with pan-roasted cumin
- Beet-scallion latkes with cayenne crème fraîche
- Escarole and endive salad with Valencia oranges and fig molasses vinaigrette
- Tray of mini pastries



Assorted mini pastries from Didier Dumas in Nyack are a sweet way to end the night.



Thinking seasonally and wanting a bit more variety – this is a celebration, after all – I'd create two other latkes, as well: butter-nut squash-leek latkes and beet-scallion latkes. I'd add pan-roasted cumin to the butternut squash to give it exotic flair, and then a dollop of sour cream would help pull all the flavors together. Meanwhile, the mellow flavors of the beet-scallion latkes would be offset by a cayenne-spiked crème fraîche.

Once I get started, I just can't help myself, so a few other dishes find their way onto the menu, too: Parmesan-fennel twists make an addictive finger food – when you add melted Parmesan to anything, it's hard to eat just one. Mixed olives and sesame-crusted almonds are always crowd-pleasers, so I'd put those out as well. A salad of bit-

ter greens and Valencia oranges, topped with a fig molasses vinaigrette, is a nice antidote to the rich latkes. Crunchy, bitter and refreshing, the salad also adds beautiful colors to the table.

HANUKKAH CHEERS

No holiday party is complete without some bubbly – after all, what says celebration more than sparkling wine? For this party, I'm serving two spectacular sparklers. The Blanc de Blancs from Lieb Family Cellars on the North Fork of Long Island is only produced in exceptional years, and the 2007 vintage is outstanding. Crisp with lovely green apple notes, it's an ideal companion for my potato latkes.

The salmon-pink Méthode Champenoise



To encourage mingling, set up a festive buffet of bite-size food.

Shop Rockland

Like what you see on Viviane's Hanukkah table? You can find many of her holiday accessories at local Rockland shops. Take a look.

ASSORTED MINI PASTRIES (\$3.95 each); Patisserie Didier Dumas, 163 Main St., Nyack, 845-353-2031, didierdumas.com

MICHAEL ARAM MENORAH \$125; Juliska Amalia flutes, \$112 a pair; Juliska glass napkin rings, \$20 each; Silver plated tray, \$135; Ned Kelly & Co., 458 Piermont Ave., Piermont, 845-359-4480, nedkellyandco.com

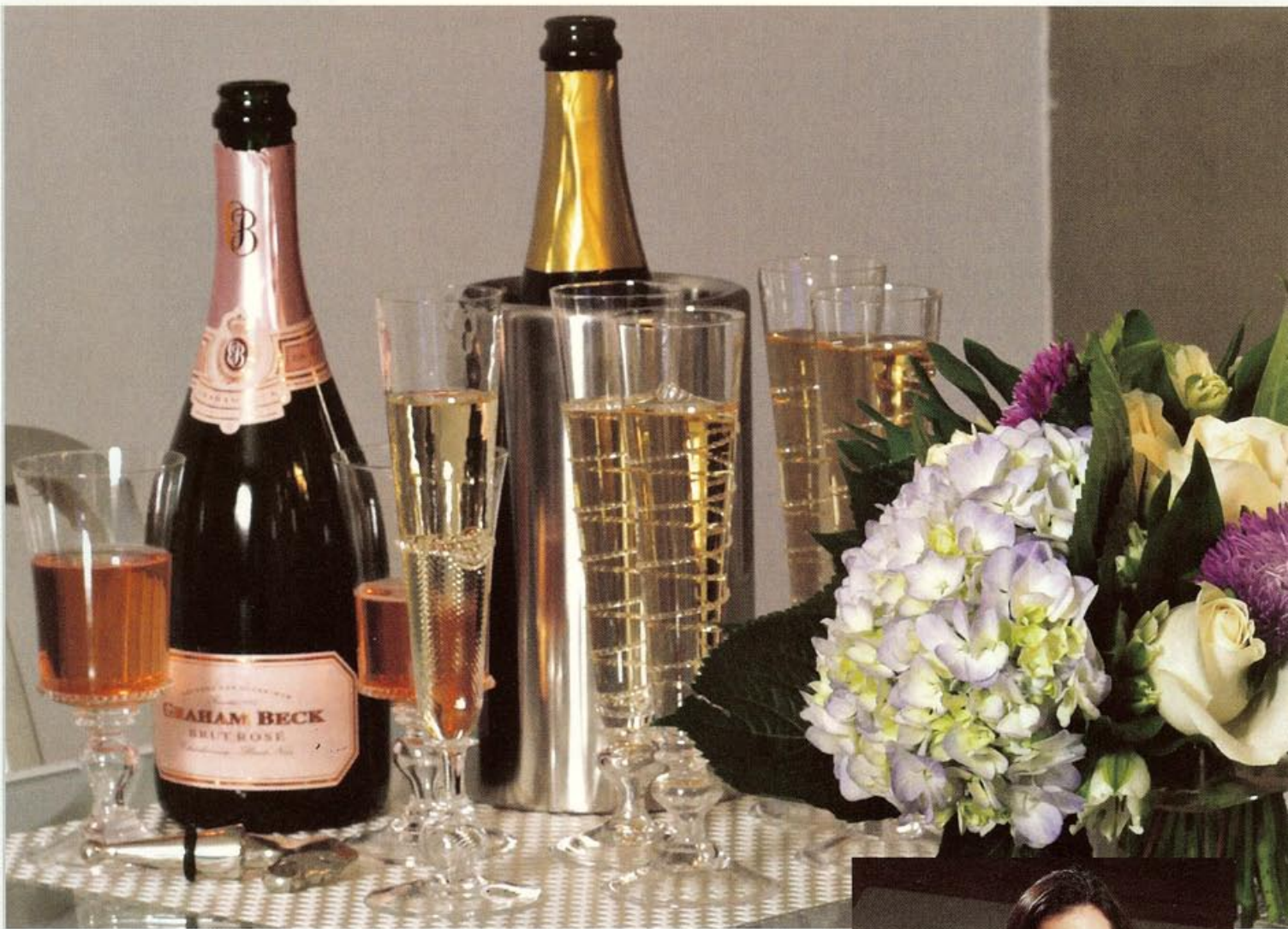
HEIDI & ARTHUR CHOCOLATIER CANDIED ORANGE PEEL \$12.50; 614 Corporate Way, Valley Cottage, 845-267-2666, heidiandarthurs.com

LIEB FAMILY CELLARS BLANC DE BLANCS 2004; \$35 at Wine for All, 516 Route 303, Orangeburg, 845-680-9463, idrinkwine.com

GRAHAM BECK BRUT ROSÉ \$15; Piermont Fine Wines, 305 Piermont Ave., Piermont, 845-359-0700, piermontwine.com

A traditional silver and blue color scheme brightens dinner and dessert.





Sparkling wine, served in Juliska flutes, add a touch of glamour to the evening.

Brut Rosé from Graham Beck winery in South Africa is made with a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes. Lovely to look at, it's blessed with a delicate strawberry flavor and lively bubbles – a perfect complement to my beet latkes. Served in exquisite flutes by Juliska, these sparklers complement the flavor of the food and they also add a touch of glamour to a meal that began with – to think! – humble potatoes.

TABLE TALK

Blue and silver are traditional Hanukkah colors, and so naturally I would work them into my decor. First, I found cloth napkins in different hues of blue. Next, I created bouquets of white roses and blue hydrangeas. They're surprisingly easy to arrange and both are widely available at local florists. Meanwhile, silver trays and bowls pepper elegance throughout the table.

A menorah, of course, is de rigueur and Ned Kelly & Co., in Piermont, had just the

one: a gorgeous nickelplate Tree of Life menorah by Michael Aram. It looks stunning and adds both a traditional note and architectural drama to the table.

While I don't want gifts to be the focus of the evening, I want to give my guests a token to take home and remember this special night. For this, I bought exquisite chocolate bites from Chocolaterie in Nyack and candy from Heidi & Arthur Chocolatier in Valley Cottage. Clad in stripes or polka dots, with blue and white ribbons, the chocolates helped further the Hanukkah theme – and the glamour, too – and my guests would recall the fun every time they took a bite.

In the end, hosting a holiday party – even when it's not your holiday – can be tremendously meaningful and fun. So go the extra mile and be creative, because that's what will make it memorable. And always include cherished friends and wonderful, seasonal food – key ingredients for any festive party, regardless of the holiday you happen to celebrate.



About Viviane

A native of a French island in the South Pacific, Viviane Bauquet Farre has been an avid cook since the age of 6, when she began preparing all her family's meals, perched on a stool. Today, she's focused on local, seasonal cooking, which you can see on her blog, foodandstyle.com. She's a regular contributor to Rockland Magazine, The Journal News and Vegetarian Times, and her recipes have also been featured at bonappetit.com and saveur.com, where her blog was crowned "Best of the Web."