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Summer 2007

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BY HOLLY BURNS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER FRANK EDWARDS

HERE COMES THE **sun**

*A busy event planner winds down,
celebrating the arrival of summer
with a Southern fish fry*

Kristin Newman knows how to throw a party.

With seven years in the event planning business, she's engineered intimate get-togethers and all-out shindigs—and everything in between. She's a whiz at invitations. She's a pro at table decor. She knows a catering menu like the back of her hand. In fact, there's only one thing Kristin Newman, party planner extraordinaire, isn't so accustomed to doing. And that's throwing herself a party.

"It's a lot harder to plan your own celebration than it is to plan someone else's," she laughs. "You have parameters when

you're working with a client; you say, 'Okay, this person likes blue, they want seafood, they'd like to be outside,' and you go with that. But when I think about entertaining for myself, I realize I can do anything I want, and it's overwhelming! It's so much easier to make decisions for other people than it is for myself. Besides, who has time to throw themselves a party?"

But summer in the lowcountry has a funny effect on people. They slow down, they mellow out, they kick back. And as temperatures rise, Kristin finds that her work schedule starts to clear a little. She can breathe again. The days get longer, and she



has more time to enjoy them. "My husband says 'Oh, it's summer, I can see my wife again!'" she jokes. And that illusive party? It suddenly starts to look a little more feasible.

To welcome the season, Kristin has planned a get-together for a few pals, the kind of occasion where shirtsleeves are rolled up and feet are bare, where no one minds if you show up a little late, and there's never any worry about using the "wrong fork." And as for exchanging presents or making speeches? Why, this isn't a formal occasion—in fact, it isn't really an occasion at all. "Create your own holiday, make up something to celebrate," advises Kristin, whose predominant memories of summers past involve annual fish fries at her grandparents' lake house in Tennessee. "Commemorating the first day of summer is something we've done in my family for a long time. When I think of June, I think of trying fish by the dock."

Thank goodness then, that husband Chris is an avid flats fisherman with a penchant for cooling and a recipe for fried fish that—according to his wife—is "to die for." Thank goodness, too, that working in the event planning industry means your closest friends are caterers and floral designers. "If there's one thing I've figured out through planning 30 or 40 parties a year," says Kristin, "it's that I can't do everything myself. I have very talented friends, so it makes sense to enjoy each others' skills when we get together. Sure, this is what we do for a living—but we do it because we love it."

To that end, chef Traci Wilson of Granville's Catering has taken



Gone Fishing A fresh arrangement of fern and Queen Anne's lace marks the entrance to the Motor Pleasant property; apropos of the season, fishing is the main event at the waterfront fête where Kristin and husband Chris—their fishing crew in tow—parade back to dry land, armed with the day's catch.



Menu: Fried Spottail Bass with Potato-Chip Fish Batter • Jalapeño-Relish Hushpuppies • Apple Cider Vinegar Slaw • Cucumber, Onion, & Tomato Salad • Traci's Granny's Macaroni & Cheese • Truffled Deviled Eggs • Bourbon Blackberry Cobbler • Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream

Easy Does It

Lightweight fabric in khaki and green ticking updates an old farmhouse table pulled outdoors for the occasion and set with simple white plates, bamboo bowls, and yellow and white poppies arranged with fern and Queen Anne's lace in a rustic wooden bin.

STEAL THIS IDEA:

This bamboo bowl is perfect for use and reuse on your outdoor table. \$3.95 at Crate & Barrel





STEAL THIS IDEA:

Incorporate your guests' talents into your party plan. Delight in the unexpected.



Friends In Deed Kristin is a firm believer in making the most of what her guests do best. For example, she relied on pal Dave Wilson (left)—a restaurateur and caterer by trade—to arrive armed with delicious fare from his kitchen; blacksmith Sean Aborn (above left) offered up horseshoes; he crafted blindef at his workshop in the Neck, while wife Heather Earrie Aborn (right), an event and floral designer and close friend of Kristin's, happily outfitted the at-fresco fête with bright blooms and natural greenery. Friend Morgan Young and her beau Ryan Kennedy—who works in the beverage industry—whipped up a batch of spiked homemade lincaule which they served garnished with fresh mint, while pal Sara Gertshaw lent a hand in the set-up.



Guests are welcomed to their seat at the table with a handmade placecard alongside a fresh lemon and its oak twig. Left: In keeping with the laid-back, let-your-hair-down nature of the gathering, guests take their turns on the guitar—no experience required.



charge of the food, even hand-baking potato chips to make the batter for Chris's fish recipe. Event and floral designer Heather Barrie-Ahern fashioned a few informal centerpieces out of lilies, poppies, and Queen Anne's lace. Kristin's assistant Morgan Young and her boyfriend Ryan Kennedy—who works in the beverage industry—have whipped up pitchers of vodka-laced limeade, its cool tartness a perfect foil for the hot day. And blacksmith Sean Ahern has made sure the party isn't just about eating and drinking by fashioning a set of iron horseshoes to be used in a spirited game.



"Kristin and I always joke about how we can relate to the idea of the cobblers' children having no shoes," laughs Heather. "We love entertaining, but all of our energy goes into our work—it's nice to finally be able to use our ideas for something of our own. And it really takes the pressure off to only have to think about one element of a party."

The wide-open lawn overlooking Hobcaw Creek invites laid-back lounging, framed with the shade of palms and oaks. There's a tire swing to laze on, plenty of space to run around in, and a dock from which to launch the Newmans' boat onto the river in search of

dinner—some freshly caught spottail bass to be fried in a Dutch oven. "One thing I love about living in this region is the diversity of our surroundings," says Kristin. "You don't have to travel very far to find a quiet spot near the water and be able to feel like you're really getting away from it all."

Fish Tails The first hint of the prizes waiting to be caught in the creek was the party invitation itself (below), a simply wrapped gift box containing a vintage fishing lure and a hand-written note. Of course, a requisite part of fishing with this crew is keeping tabs on the size of each others' catches.

STEAL THIS IDEA:

Gift party boxes from old collections. This one's from Chris's stash of vintage fishing lures.



Al Fresco Fare

Dinner is a collaborative effort and includes Kristin's apple-cider vinegar slaw and cucumber, onion, & tomato salad, Traci's jalapeño-relish hushpuppies, macaroni & cheese, and truffled deviled eggs, and Chris' potato-chip battered fried fish, which he prepares in a Dutch oven.



With the just-caught fish the star of the show, the rest of the menu consists of low-maintenance dishes that can be made in advance and brought out when the fish is done. Along with a coleslaw recipe from Kristin's aunt and a classic cucumber, onion, and tomato salad—"there's no reinvention of the wheel on this, but I can't imagine a fish fry without it"—other accompaniments include Truc's jalapeño-relish hushpuppies and his grandmother's macaroni and cheese. There are also, of course—this being summer and the South—trays of truffled deviled eggs. For dessert, blackberry cobbler and homemade ice cream take Kristin back to warm Tennessee afternoons spent picking blackberries with her mother and the family dog—"who'd eat half of them and get blackberry juice all over his face."

And that's what it's all about, really, this getting together with friends, this letting go, this slowing down—it's about remembering summers past, those days when Monday mornings meant nothing, cushioned as they were in the endless stretch of vacation. "For one or another of us, there's a memory behind every dish on this menu," says Kristin. "We're making comfort food, family recipes, things that are evocative of summer. Food can take you back to a certain time in your life so easily, and that's what I want this whole party to do—to relive the first excitement of summer we always felt as a child."



Here's to Summer Ryan serves ice-cold drinks from the tub in preparation for a twilight supper which the group concludes with a toast to the season ahead.



POTATO-CHIP BATTERED FRIED FISH

(SERVES 6)

Peanut oil (for Dutch oven)
6 spottail bass fillets, cut six inches
thick
2 cups whole milk
2 cups flour
4 cups potato chips, crushed

Pour oil in a Dutch oven and heat to 325°F. One at a time, dip bass fillets in milk until completely covered. Dredge in flour and soak in milk again. Dredge in crushed potato chips until completely covered. Using tongs, lower into the oven and fry until golden brown.

Remove from oil with tongs and drain on a paper towel. Serve when cooled.

For the homemade potato chips:

1 qt peanut oil
5 Idaho potatoes, peeled and sliced
thinly with a mandolin



Homemade potato chips for Coris' prize-worthy fish batter are crushed and then used to coat the fillets, also dredged in milk and flour.

Salt and pepper

Heat peanut oil in a large, deep pan to 350°F. Add potatoes to oil in small batches and cook until golden brown. Remove from pan and drain on paper towels. While hot, sprinkle with salt and pepper.

To prepare for use in batter, pile chips in a large bowl. Crush into very small pieces, using a wooden spoon or other utensil.

APPLE CIDER VINEGAR SLAW

(SERVES 6)

1 head of cabbage, shredded
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
1 green bell pepper, chopped
1 Vidalia onion, chopped
3/4 cup sugar
1 cup apple cider vinegar

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Hosting Hints

Some words of wisdom for your next outdoor party:

• **"Ask for help"**—everyone has a friend who's good with flowers, a friend who knows about wine, a friend who loves to bake. Share the wealth. Let them do the hard for you, and everyone will feel good knowing that you all shipped in together. It takes the pressure off the hostess to make everything "perfect," and everyone ends up having a better time.

• **"Make people feel like they're in their own element,"** they'll have more fun. To create a bonier outdoor space at our party, for example, I put a seagrass rug outside. People feel feeling like they're in their own living room; it makes them more comfortable.

• **"Don't stress yourself out with furniture or seating arrangements—just reinvent what you have."** If you don't own an outdoor table, drag your kitchen table outside. My big farmhouse table only seats six, so I added a white-washed bench at either side, and a red vintage buffet table for the food. None of it matches—but who cares?

• **"Buy one special thing to spice up the party."** For this occasion, I bought green tumblers etched with ferns. Only buy one thing, though—don't go crazy!

• **"Insist upon a menu that can be made ahead of time,"** so that on the day of the party, everything is ready to go and you can just fry your fish—which only takes a few minutes.



Kristin relied upon a maharaband menu full of chilled salads and other easy-to-prepare dishes so that both she and her guests could relax and unwind the day of the party.

3/4 cup salad oil
1 tsp. celery seed
1 Tbs. salt

Layer first five ingredients in a medium bowl. Pour sugar over top, but do not stir. In a large saucepan, mix vinegar, salad oil, and celery seed. Bring to a boil and, while still hot, pour into the bowl over the layered ingredients. Do not stir. Refrigerate overnight. When ready to serve, stir and drain excess liquid. Season with salt. Serve chilled.

CUCUMBER, ONION, & TOMATO SALAD (SERVES 6-8)

1 1/2 cup red white vinegar
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/2 cup sugar
1 bunch basil, chopped
1 bunch mint, chopped
1 Tbs. garlic, chopped
6 cucumbers, chopped
4 tomatoes, chopped
1 red onion

Salt and pepper

In a bowl, mix vinegar, olive oil, sugar, basil, mint, and garlic. Add cucumbers, tomatoes and red onion. Sauce together. Season with salt and pepper.

TRAE'S GRANNY'S MACARONI & CHEESE (SERVES 6)

8 oz. angel hair pasta, cooked and drained
1 stick butter, melted

5 eggs, beaten
1 lb. cheese, shredded
3 cups whole milk

Preheat oven to 375°F

Place cooked pasta in a medium bowl. Add butter and beaten eggs and mix until combined. Gradually add cheese, stirring continuously. Pour into a 6- x 9 inch baking dish and add milk until the mixture is covered. Bake for 25 minutes, or until the top is golden brown. Serve immediately.

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BOURBON BLACKBERRY COBBLER

(SERVES 8-10)

For the blackberry filling:

6 cups fresh blackberries

1/3 cup brown sugar

2/3 cup Jack Daniel's whiskey

For the topping:

2 lbs. butter

8 cups sugar

8 eggs

4 cups sour cream

2 Tbs. baking powder

8 cups flour

2 Tbs. cinnamon

Pinch of salt

Preheat oven to 375°F. Butter a 6- x 9-inch baking dish.

Mix berries, sugar, and whiskey together in a medium bowl, and chill in the refrigerator for 50 minutes. While the mixture is marinating, combine the topping ingredients together in a separate bowl and set aside.

When ready to bake, pour filling into the prepared baking dish. Pour in topping mixture. Bake for 45 minutes. Let cool slightly before serving.

FRESH-SQUEEZED LIMEADE

(SERVES 6)

1 1/2 cups freshly squeezed lime juice

4 cups cold water

1 1/2 cups sugar

6 oz. vodka, if desired

Ice cubes

6 lime slice twists

6 mint sprigs

Mix lime juice, water, and sugar; refrigerate until chilled. Stir in vodka, if desired. Serve over ice in tall glasses; garnish with lime slice twists and mint.

Note: Limeade can be frozen in ice cube trays and the cubes added to the drinks so that it will not be diluted. Also, the ice cubes can be processed in a blender or food processor to make a delicious lime slush.