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Designing A Dream



Inspiration Abounds

Life is beautiful for south Johnson County artist Diane Boone-Crouse.

WORDS: KIMBERLY STERN | PHOTOS: PAUL VERSLUIS

Diane Boone-Crouse is the ultimate right-brain/left-brain miracle—an anomaly of sorts. Her resume describes an accomplished culinary whiz, artist extraordinaire and polished business woman. While sometimes the line blurs when she's creating art or "painting" jaw-dropping visuals with food styling, the lusty interpretation she brings to each process is evident; it's just the canvas that differs.

Sitting in the kitchen of her eclectic, highly creative Johnson County colonial one morning eating a simple but meltingly sensual breakfast of herb-studded scrambled eggs (brown, of course) and velvety yogurt drizzled with wildflower honey and plump, jewel-colored, mouth-watering fruit straight from a magical farmer's market—Boone-Crouse reflects on how her art and food intersected years ago.

"Food is art," she says. "When I started working with food, I had just emerged from a ceramics education. It's not a long stretch to go from malleable clay to manipulating dough into desserts and breads. Both are extremely hands-on mediums."

Boone-Crouse's stunning plate presentations or table designs speak of the corroboration. It's easy to appreciate how her love of art incorporates her culinary life. Educated as an occasional art student (she attended the University of Missouri and the Kansas City Art Institute), world traveler (she lived in Lyon, France and Negril, Jamaica) and entrepreneur (she owns Arcadian Event Site), Boone-Crouse finds great joy in the seduction of color and texture—a personal trait evident on every canvas in her home. A quick tour of her suburban gallery reveals art that emanates from a passionate artist's heart and soul.

Finding much of her inspiration through her extensive travels to the world's gems such as Aspen, Colo., Italy and New Mexico, Boone-Crouse searches for beauty in everything she sees, tucking the imagery away for future use. Vivid memories of living in France's prolific Burgundy area and a romantic, primitive thatch hut in Jamaica still fuel her imagination.

However, Boone-Crouse admits her approach to art is not particularly intellectual, steeped in formal training, restrained or analytical. She says she releases her mind and allows it to channel naturally and creatively, not presupposed to destination.

"Essentially, I allow the feel and composition of my art the freedom to change and evolve," she says.

In fact, Boone-Crouse often creates a canvas, hangs it on a wall of her home and lives with it for awhile—sometimes years—until she completes it.

"I don't want to overwork anything," she says.

However, the one common thread dancing through each piece she composes is color—lots and lots of glorious,

saturated, dynamic color.

"It's a known fact that color heals," she says. "People will always resonate with and be attracted to different colors. I strongly believe it's our inner essence."

Artistic influences came early to Boone-Crouse, most notably a high school summer course she took when she was only 10 years old.

"I distinctly remember that I was determined to draw flowers," she says. "But George, the avant garde instructor, made us do contemporary art. That changed my approach going forward."

In later years, Boone-Crouse experienced a pivotal moment through workshops taught by Sarah Oblinger of California's Paint or Die Studio.

"I thought it was a painting class," Boone-Crouse remembers. "It wasn't. It was an art psychology class about art's creative process through tiny, detailed work. Sarah didn't critique participants. Rather, she helped us free our minds. It must have been fate because Sarah's emphasis on creating from intuition has been a trademark of my combined art and culinary lives."

Boone-Crouse stresses she paints for her own enjoyment and gratification. It's just a bonus that art aficionados have clamored for Boone-Crouse's creations since she set up a gallery at her Overland Park business, Arcadian Event Site.

"I paint for myself, for the process," she says.

Boone-Crouse's love for art is displayed prevalently throughout her home, which could easily be mistaken for a gallery in and of itself.

From an oversized, moody painting of an aged tobacco barn inspired by a road trip with her 21-year-old daughter, Jessica (she also has a 17-year-old son, Mason, a Blue Valley student) that hangs proudly in her sitting room to renovated furniture and profound heirloom displays, Boone-Crouse's home tells an intriguing story.

"People often ask how they can start pursuing their 'inner art,'" Boone-Crouse says. "Dedicate a space in your home for a studio—it doesn't need to be perfect, just a special nook or corner. Organize your materials, put on some great music, close your eyes and breathe deeply. Then, begin."

She recommends fledgling painters not let their inner critic take over.

"Certainly don't worry about your art being judged by others," she says. "Just let it flow. The sheer joy in creating art is the process."

For Diane Boone-Crouse, it's a recipe that works every time.

For More Information on Johnson Country artist and food stylist Diane Boone-Crouse, visit www.arcadianeventsite.com or call (913) 381-0505.



IT'S A STATION OVATION

Showcase your personal style with sophisticated food stations.

WORDS: MANDY PHALEN

Whether you serve appetizers alone or have them make up the entire meal, food stations allow hosts to showcase their personality and let guests in on the action. Hosts—no longer satisfied asking guests “chicken or fish?”—are seeking fresh ways to ensure that their event menu is unique, satisfying and fun.

Food stations can turn an event into the ultimate tasting menu, allowing guests to sample regional ingredients and the host to offer samples of their favorite dish or bring eclectic ethnic cuisines to life all at a single event. Having multiple offerings of food in small portions allows a host to take more risk. If someone doesn't like a certain station, they can always go on to the next.

While traditional sit-down dinners

will always be in demand, you can still have the sophistication of a sit-down dinner without the heavy orchestration by utilizing food stations. Setting up action stations that pair menu items with coordinating beverages—tapas with red and white sangria, sushi with sake, risotto with Italian beer—is a chic alternative that gives you more opportunities to mingle with guests.

Show and Tell

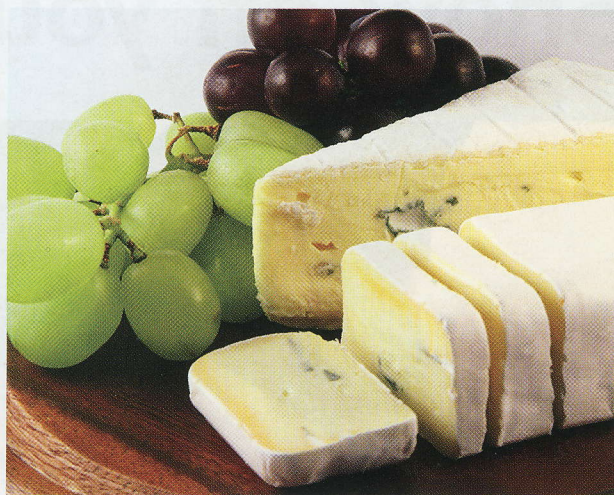
The interactivity of action stations is one of the main attractions of this type of service style. In the past, the idea of an action station was a server standing behind a table carving meat. Today, with the explosion of food media, people are more educated on the prepa-

ration and presentation of food. More specifically, guests enjoy seeing how something goes from an assortment of independent food ingredients to tasteful creations. For example, offering wine and cheese pairings at a station has become increasingly popular because it allows hosts or serving staff to talk to guests about the characteristics of the cheeses and how they pair with different wines. Stations that pair chocolate and wine are also a great option. For a totally different sensation, try organic chocolate bars that are infused with different flavors such as chile or lime and pair those with wine. Challenging your guests to try new and different food combinations will, at a minimum, give them something to talk about.

Taste Update

Stations also allow hosts to get creative with cuisine, offering favorite foods in miniature or creating dishes around a specific ingredient. We're seeing clients take inspiration for menus everywhere—from their favorite home-style food to a ballpark theme. Comfort foods such as hamburgers, pizza, mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese have been a big hit with guests. To update the classic backyard burger, try offering a mini-burger station where you provide the basic toppings in addition to unusual toppings such as fried leeks, artisan cheeses and roasted peppers. Or try serving comfort foods like gourmet mashed potatoes or macaroni and cheese in martini glasses—talk about stylish fare! Mini-pizza stations are always a big hit, but a bruschetta bar can take the idea of pizza to a whole new tantalizing level.

Stations are also an ideal way to introduce your guests to regional or ethnic cuisine in petite portions. Instead of trying to merge cultural cuisines into a single dish, try incorporating



Guests' dietary restrictions are a concern for many hosts, but offering a variety of stations allows people to choose dishes that fit their diet choices.

the cuisines into the menu by choosing one style for the cocktail hour and another for dinner—for example, Latin-style hors d'oeuvres during cocktails followed by a California-style entree.

Weighty Matters

Guests' dietary restrictions are a concern for many hosts, but offering a variety of stations allows people to choose dishes that fit their diet choices. In addition, serving smaller portions throughout the evening is healthier than a loaded plate consumed over a short period of time.

Dessert, though, is one area where people are almost always willing to indulge. My mouth is watering thinking of the savory and sweet crepes that can form an amazing dessert station. Guests can fill (and fill they do!) the crepes with items such as fruit, chocolate, raspberry sauce and whipped cream. Yum!

Offering food stations or miniature food choices is a great way to shape an event with your personal style and flare. Better yet, your guests will learn a little more about you and appreciate the energy the event maintained throughout the day or evening. Any way you entertain is always a statement of what and who is important to you, so continue to entertain in style and share good food and good times with good people.



Mandy Phalen, owner of Event Studio, has been planning events and special occasions for more than eight years. You can contact Mandy at (913) 469-1850 or visit www.event-studio.com.

