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A COFFEE WITH ... ■ DENISE SILVERMAN AND N'YOKA COLEMAN

Hosts can retain holiday cheer by hiring helper, party planners advise

By Melanie Spencer
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

It's nearly 3 p.m., and this reporter can't race to Pacha on Burnet Road fast enough for a much-needed dose of caffeine.

Aside from the usual work and social commitments, it's the holiday season, so afternoon lethargy is not an option. Local event planners Denise Silverman and N'Yoka Coleman are waiting. Silverman is the owner of Soirée Event Production, and Coleman is a recent addition to the party posse.

The topic of the hour: last-minute party tips.

The fuel: eggnog latte for Silverman; iced café con leche for Coleman; mocha latte made with Mexican chocolate for the writer-on-the-fly.

Early chit-chat centers on Soirée's 2007 feast of fêtes, including the Texas 4000 for Cancer gala, held at the downtown Hilton, and the taffeta-covered, orchid-infused, foodie-fabulous grand opening party for Primizie Osteria (1000 E. 11th St., 236-0088, www.primizieaustin.com).

"It's a beautiful space," Silverman says of Primizie. "Clean and contemporary with powdery blue on the walls ... They are also caterers, so the food was the focal point."

(Note to self: Schedule dinner at Primizie ASAP.)

Quickly — probably because the coffee is taking hold — talk turns to the pair's primo party tips.

"A lot of people don't have fun at family gatherings anymore, so we're doing karaoke," Silverman says. "I have a karaoke machine — don't ask me why; I just do."

After a couple of sideways glances and a brief silence, there is laughter around the table. We let Silverman out of an explanation, and she gladly jumps back to her tips.

If the party budget permits, Silverman recommends hiring a holiday helper.

"There is nothing worse than hosting an event and not enjoying it," Silverman says. "Pay someone $15 an hour to refresh drinks and bus tables. It changes the way you enjoy a party."

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Melanie Spencer AMERICAN-STATESMAN
Denise Silverman and N'Yoka Coleman

COFFEE: Consider having a royal blue Christmas

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Coleman typically plans corporate events, but many of her ideas can also easily translate to larger social gatherings.

"You can shift the venue all together and (use) tents," Coleman says. "Theme tents — Asian, with sushi and red décor or a carnival theme with cotton candy, funnel cakes — give a little variety and you can save money."

"You can really make tents look beautiful," Silverman says.

"And the weather doesn't matter, because they can heat or air-condition the tents," Coleman adds.

By now, the coffee cups are nearly empty, but not the wealth of tips:

Silverman on decor: Royal blue is the new red. It's pretty, bright and festive.

Coleman on an alternative to karaoke: a family scavenger hunt in the city or neighborhood. Pick small, Christmas-centered items, and the winner gets a family prize.

Silverman on cocktails: Create a signature drink. There are so many — eggnog martini, peppermint martini; you can do an online search on holiday drinks for ideas.

Colemen on charity: Incorporate giving back, whether going out to help feed other families or giving canned goods. It's good to do that for children, too, so they know the value of giving.

Finally, Silverman on centerpieces: Throw a bunch of ornaments in a glass vase. Also, decorate your house plants with ornaments.

And there you have it, an hour's worth of high-octane, party secrets from the pros. Our late-afternoon coffee klatsch disperses, but the caffeine continues to work its magic into the evening, when Silverman is spotted breezing past the window at downtown's Maiko (yes, the slightest mention of sushi prompts an undeniable craving). She's on her way to — you guessed it — a holiday party.

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