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Afew days before the big event, Stacey Glassman's custom-built barn kitchen buzzes with activity. One cook might be roasting red peppers that will become a topping for crostini...

Through it all, the staff checks off their tasks on Glassman's detailed checklists, which even specify the particular kind of spatula that must be packed to go to the event site.

For twenty-five years, Stacey Glassman has run Swan's Way, a Lincolnville catering operation that provides food, drinks, and ambience for many of the state's most exclusive functions.

It's no coincidence that her business is named after the Proust novel, in which tea and madeleines send the narrator into a swirl of memories.

By all accounts, Glassman achieved that goal with the wedding last September of Adam Klein and Jennette Kollmann, New York lighting designers who planned their reception for a meadow on a saltwater farm in Martinsville...

Glassman's skill, the couple say, was evident in the way she steered them through the difficult process of selecting a menu that would please both the meat-and-potatoes set and the more adventurous eaters.

Glassman has been catering in the midcoast area since 1980, when Swan's Way was born as a Camden restaurant specializing in what Glassman describes as "international, down-home cooking."

All along, she'd been catering out of the restaurant, too, so when Swan's Way the restaurant closed, it seemed natural to maintain Swan's Way the caterer.

Since the late eighties, Glassman says, the venues for events in the midcoast haven't changed much - there's the Camden Yacht Club, the Owls Head Transportation Museum...



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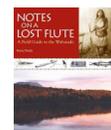
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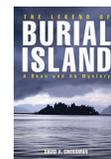
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was held. Of course, putting on an elegant event in a field requires trucking in just about every element you need. It makes for a long day for the staff, who must load a truck with supplies in the morning, travel to the site, unload, set up, serve, and clean up. "Catering is hard work," Glassman says with evident pride. "You're lugging food for 150 to a tent, hauling charcoal, cases of soda, 400 to 500 pounds of ice - it's not just about going to a party and passing someone hors d'oeuvres."

Unusual locations also mean that Glassman must rent everything from lighting to ovens, since the majority of the food she serves is cooked on-site. And she must coordinate the logistics of cooking a hot meal for 150 people who need to be served at the same time. It sounds simple, but once you start thinking about how you'd do it at home, for example, the complications become evident. The solution, she says, is to keep all of these considerations in mind early on in the menu planning so that every course, for example, doesn't rely on the same oven. The upshot, she says, is "let's do this grilled, this in the oven, this at room temperature - that's the reality of catering in Maine."

That planning starts as much as a year before the event, particularly for weddings. If she's working at a new venue - a private home, for example - Glassman visits it several times in order to anticipate logistical problems, find ideas, and simply get a sense of the atmosphere. And then there are the hours of discussion with clients. "We talk about everything from do we have anything to do with the ceremony to how the event is going to flow to what's important to the bride and groom, and how is the mother going to impact the planning," she says. "You can go on for hours before you even get to the food."

Those discussions, which often take place at Glassman's Lincolnville home, with wide views of her herb gardens and the woods beyond, were a treasured part of the process for Klein and Kollmann. "The most fun we had with her was planning the wedding and going to her place," says Klein. "She would take us outside and have us try some of her herbs - she'd rip a leaf off something and say, 'Here, taste this.'"

Glassman's inspiration comes largely from the time she's spent in Italy over the years. Her parents moved to Italy when Glassman was in college; her father, a shoe designer who once worked for the factories in Biddeford and Kennebunk, had found work in the mecca of shoemaking. Since then, she's used her parents' home in Florence as a base for exploration. "We'd go to the coast to a shoe factory, then stop to have a great seafood dish in a little village," she says. "Since they lived there, they knew all the great places . . . It's my main influence, and I really don't feel like I've had food that could match it."

A hallmark of Glassman's cuisine is a kind of sophisticated taste-test she'll present as an hors d'oeuvre. At the simple end is a crostini table, with grilled bread and a variety of toppings, ranging from sun-dried tomatoes to oil-cured olives and tuna with capers. More unexpected is a selection of grilled sausage alongside a variety of mustards, or a fall spread of Maine apple varieties. "We'll get Jonathans, Gravensteins, Golden Delicious, and Cortlands, so people can try the different apples, which I think is really fun," she says.

The hors d'oeuvres also give Glassman a chance to play with unique ethnic dishes that may be too outré to serve for dinner. And they all fit in with her overall philosophy, as described by Sarah Pratt, a former employee of Glassman's who now runs her own event-planning business in Camden: "Everything is fresh, everything is top of the line, and nothing is ordinary."

That extends to the garnishes on dishes, which tend to be edible herbs and flowers from Glassman's own garden. Platters and serving dishes come from Glassman's collection, which takes up shelf after shelf in the basement of the barn she had specially built to accommodate the prep work and storage that catering requires. Even the waste generated by the event gets special attention: used frying oil is donated to the Chewonki Foundation for use as biodiesel fuel, vegetable scraps are turned into compost, and, when plastic dishes are used, they're a special biodegradable variety.

Overall, the effect is one of eclectic elegance. That vision, though, comes at a price. While Glassman says she's happy to help couples with a strict budget pull off an elegant event, she adds that rentals alone can cost \$6,000 to \$10,000. Conversely, "if someone's got the budget for it," she says, "if there's anything you want in the world, we can get it."

In the end, Glassman is "definitely not pretentious and neither is her food, though the type of people she attracts are the type of people who don't have a tight budget for their wedding," says Pratt. "They can afford the finer things and, whether she likes to admit it or not, she is one of the finer things."

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