



The host with the most

Thinking Outside of the Basket

There's more to **Wade Williams'** PICNIC than great food

Story by **CHRIS KLONOSKI** // Photography by **BRADLEY MEINZ**

“**P**eople don't like red alcohol in their homes anymore,” says Wade Williams. “God bless America — somebody invented white cranberry juice.” So the “Wadetini” — white cranberry juice, **Gran Centenario Jose Cuervo** tequila, fresh mint, fresh cranberries and a little simple syrup — was born from necessity. “You can also do it with vodka,” Williams continues. “It's absolutely fabulous.”

Williams ought to know because knowledge of all things fabulous is his bailiwick. With one foot in entertainment and one foot in entertaining, Williams has combined the two by creating art and ambiance while setting new standards for sat-

isfying very stylish appetites.

His company, **PICNIC**, focuses on LA and New York but has been known to enliven a few Texas birthday parties. He's been featured on *E!* Entertainment, *The Food Network* and the Fine Living show, *The Perfect Party*. Clients include **Lara Flynn Boyle**, **Christina Applegate** and **Diane von Fürstenburg**. He recently concluded his third Oscar season by overseeing the style and design of the **Victoria's Secret/Fredric Fekkai** suites while serving lamb chop on a pita with white bean puree and fresh chives, red endive with caramelized pecan, chevre, frisee and fresh fig with a honey drizzle and, of course, frosted cupcakes.

After acting on shows like *Murphy Brown*, *The Young and the Restless* and *Beverly Hills, 90210*, Williams focused on food.

“I had a very wise agent,” Williams explains. His agent advised him to focus on two things. “So if you are not acting, you have something else you are really good at. I can throw a good party. I just know how to entertain. It was by instinct. I remember my parents throwing their little parties in the '70s and thinking, ‘These parties suck. When I grow old, I'm going to have a fun party.’ I have a knack for putting together people and events and food.”

Entering the catering world in LA is as competitive as an open casting call. “I'm not your mother's caterer. I don't come in with foil pans. I come in and I bring you an event. You've got to be very distinctive.” So Williams provides a little insurance: “I've got the hottest staff on the face of the earth.”

“In LA or NY, you are always going to some party. I've got to make it so that when

people say, ‘PICNIC is going to be there,’ people are, like, ‘I'm coming!’ because A. They know they'll have a good time flirting with my staff; and B. They'll have a better time eating the food.” Williams continues, “I work with fashion people and celebrities — they just want to be comfortable and have a good time. They don't want to feel like they are being crowded or stalked by people that shouldn't be there.”

Knowing his guest list is an integral part of Williams' approach and inspiration. “I like to know my demographics.” Williams illustrates, “I just did a party for the **D.L. Hughley** show (*The Hughleys*) at the **Hollywood Center Studios**, and the producers wanted to do a very high-end cocktail reception for them. I looked at them and said, ‘Your crew is not going to get a kick out of that.’ So I created a carnival. There's a great company here that I work with that does nacho carts and margarita snow

cones and churros. I hired **In-N-Out Burger** to pull up a truck. People were trampling to get there. I've never seen such a melee before. And **Doug Herzog**, the president of **Viacom**, was overjoyed. That's the kind of cool thing I like to do.

“I'm happy when my clients are happy. I'm happy when they say they can't wait to do it again. I'm happy when people are eating and enjoying themselves.” What makes Williams unhappy is a client who micromanages. “There's nothing worse because they are not enjoying the party.”

Not enjoying a party is intolerable in the world of **PICNIC**. And that extends to your home as well.

“Whatever you do, put all your heart into it. Make

it enjoyable for you and your guests,” says Williams. “Simplicity is best. Nowadays you don't have to be a gourmet chef to look like you threw a gourmet party.” But he cautions, “A bowl of tortilla chips, salsa and a keg doesn't constitute a party.”

Williams offers a checklist: Good alcohol. Good cheeses. Tidy up. A flower arrangement never hurt. “**Trader Joe's** is the best invention for mankind. You can go there and put together a party under \$100. One-stop shopping is a good thing.” Be out of the kitchen and ready to serve: “If you do invite anyone over for dinner and you make them wait for over 45 minutes to sit down to eat — you should give up the dinner party throwing game.

“You want people to enjoy themselves. When you are throwing a party, you are trying to impress a little bit.” This applies to both the patio and the Red Carpet. “You are only as good as your last party. The Oscars is a time for me to showcase what I do best, and that is put together elegant, pretty, wonderful events.” ■

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