



Erin Crotty, director and founder of BloomStra Consulting, and her husband, Ken Brough, show off their festive table setting.

The ultimate Christmas bash

For Erin Crotty, Christmas is all about the four Fs: Family, friends, food and festivities. She combined those ingredients to prepare a tasting party for Style.

By Hattie Klotz
Photographs by Ashley Fraser

Putting people at ease is in Erin Crotty's blood. It's what she does on a day-to-day basis in her capacity as a professional image, protocol and etiquette consultant. But it's really in her own home where she can let her passion for people, parties and entertaining shine.

Crotty and her husband, Ken Brough, a chiropractor, love to host guests at their Rockcliffe Park home. "We will host some sort of party at least once a month," explains Crotty, "and my personal passion (entertaining) is connected with what I do professionally. I value relationships and creating experiences for those I love. I also carry this value into all that I do in my business for my clients."

Christmas offers the perfect excuse for an all-out celebration with mouth-watering food paired with fine wine. "Christmas is my favourite time of the year," she says. "It's all about family, friends, food, fun and festivities."

If you have fewer than a dozen people for dinner, Crotty suggests doing something a little different, such as a small-plates party. "We did it for family and a couple of friends a few years ago and people are still talking about it," recalls Crotty. "It's a good way to taste many more things and you can pair each course with wine, which is great for people who appreciate it." Crotty and Brough are members of several Napa and Sonoma wine clubs in California and they bring wine that isn't available at the LCBO back from their travels.

Crotty and Brough like their dinner parties to unfold over several hours, so that while there may be many courses, there's no sense of hurry. It's all about savouring good food, good wine and good company. Both say how important it is that their guests feel at home. "It is important to me that my guests feel special, welcomed and comfortable," says Crotty. "I also do my best to ensure that they have fun, enjoy their time in my home, have the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations and build new relationships with other guests. I want their experience to be special and memorable."



Above, roasted carrot, ginger and orange soup and, at right, baby Cajun shrimp with avocado, mango and tomato salsa.

DINNER IN 10 EASY COURSES

- 1 Roasted Carrot, Ginger and Orange Soup
- 2 Turkey and Quinoa Mini Meatloaves
- 3 Cajun Shrimp with Avocado, Mango and Tomato Salsa
- 4 Endive and Radicchio Spears with Sweet Potato, Pancetta and Chives
- 5 Beef Carpaccio with Arugula, Lemon and Truffle Oil
- 6 Lemon Sorbet Palate Cleanser
- 7 Garlicky Spaghetti with Roasted Grape Tomatoes and Basil
- 8 Seared Sea Scallops with Vegan Saffron Hollandaise and Pomegranate seeds
- 9 Rosemary-Mustard Lamb Chops with Grilled Vegetables
- 10 Petit-fours and truffles from Jacobsons





Seared Sea Scallops
with Vegan Saffron
Hollandaise and
Pomegranate Seeds



Turkey and Quinoa
Mini Meatloaves



Garlicky Spaghetti with
Roasted Grape
Tomatoes and Basil



Rosemary-Mustard
Lamb Chops with
Grilled Vegetables

Endive and Radicchio
Spears with Sweet
Potato, Pancetta and
Chives



Lemon Sorbet Palate
Cleanser

TIP LIST

- 1 Be organized. Get your shopping and preparation done well ahead of time.
- 2 Plan your mix of guests so they have something in common.
- 3 Make sure you have enough food and wine. "If in doubt, pour heavy," says Brough.
- 4 Make sure your guests get home safely.

Brough and Crotty both grew up in households where food was a passion. "My family loved to entertain," says Crotty, who hails from Newfoundland. "Good food and wine were important to my parents and I learned at an early age. My sister was the cook and I loved decorating and doing the table. I learned to cook later on." For Brough, who grew up in southern Ontario, it was the bounty and great taste of the fresh produce that sparked his interest. "My passions are travel, culture, food and wine," says Crotty, "so I enjoy bringing these together when entertaining family and friends."

While Brough used to cook, he has now handed the cooking duties over to his wife. "Erin does such a great job," he explains, "that I'm now the kitchen assistant and beverage manager!" However, he continues to do all the shopping. "I love sourcing ingredients," he says, "and I like shopping alone."

Crotty spent 20 years in the corporate and legal world, as a lawyer and later as director of professional recruitment at legal firm Borden Ladner Gervais. Then she took the plunge to start her own consultancy, Bloomstra. She became certified through the Protocol School of Washington and now works with law firms, health care professionals, accountants and many other professional associations to help employees enhance their people skills. She's seen how important graceful social skills can be from her time spent in legal firms and now she helps new recruits "outclass the competition," she says.

At Christmastime, Crotty decorates her house with plenty of white candles, red, silver and gold accents and glittering glass vases. It's a simple theme that highlights the red found in many of the couple's paintings and plays off the gold silk curtains in the living and dining rooms. She serves all her food on white china. "I own three sets of plain white china," she says with a smile.

Typically, for a small-plates party, the couple will start the evening with a glass of champagne and a selection of hors d'oeuvres, which can be eaten while chatting before the main event. For this party, they prepared baby Cajun shrimp with an avocado, mango, tomato salsa, a curried ginger-carrot soup and ground turkey and quinoa meatloaves with a hummus dip.

After this, they'll move to the dinner table for several small courses. Crotty suggested endive leaves stuffed with sautéed sweet potato, crispy pancetta and dollop of sour cream with chives, a plate of beef carpaccio with arugula, lemon, truffle oil, sea salt and parmigiano reggiano flakes, then a small break for a shot glass of sorbet as a palate



Beef Carpaccio with Arugula, Lemon and Truffle Oil

cleanser, before moving along to angel-hair pasta with roasted grape tomatoes, fresh basil and pecorino cheese, pan-seared sea scallops with pomegranate seeds and lemon hollandaise and finally, a lamb lollipop with balsamic vinegar glaze. For dessert, she served treats from a neighbourhood gourmet shop.

"There's no doubt that small plates take a lot more time and preparation. It's not as easy as a three-course meal," Crotty says, "but there is nothing more fun than planning, preparing and hosting a party—whether it is a cocktail party or a full-on dinner party."

style Visit OttawaCitizenStyle.com for all 10 recipes in Erin Crotty's Christmas party plan.



A selection of petit fours and truffles from Jacobsons Gourmet Concepts

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