



PARTY PERFECT

LEAD STORY BY EILEEN MCCLELLAND

6 STEP-BY-STEP
RECIPES FOR
YOUR **ULTIMATE**
HOLIDAY EVENT

Robert Simon of Windsor Jewelers in Winston-Salem, NC, has a showroom of nearly 6,000 square feet and an imagination big enough to fill it with clients lucky enough to revel in festive-themed events leading up to the holidays.

What's his secret? Trial and error.

"We've done everything from St. Patrick's Day to a sunken-treasure theme for Columbus Day," he says. "We've had putting class with a golf coach and tied it to winning a watch. We've had motorcycle competitions to raise money for the March of Dimes. We've done enough events, and we've made enough mistakes, that we've learned what's inherent in planning a good event."

Cathy Calhoun, owner of Calhoun Jewelers in Royersford, PA, isn't afraid of trying something new. She has planned events ranging from a wildly popular, kid-friendly, gingerbread-house contest to a hippie-era party. This year she's throwing a holiday cocktail party at her home, a former bank building with such an interesting history that it's been featured on the HGTV show *If Walls Could Talk*. "People always ask to see my house," she says. She plans to turn her living room into a jewelry store.

Any advice for the novice party planners among us?

"It's always important to have a theme, a reason for people to come, and then you have to follow that theme through with your invitations," Calhoun says. "I'm a firm believer in expensive, really good-looking invitations. And I never do an event over a weekend, people have too many other things to do. Always use a weeknight."

But if the party is to be a weekend event, David Gardner of David Gardner Jewelers in College Station, TX, prefers Fridays because the momentum created by the party leads to follow-up purchases on Saturdays.

Advance planning is paramount to avoid frustration, Simon believes. Plan well ahead, says Simon, who pencils in events on his calendar early in the year. Jenna McIver, marketing coordinator for Benari Jewelers in Exton, PA, says that immediately following an annual event, the staff brainstorms a theme for the following year.

If you decide to re-create someone else's formula, find a twist that makes it your own by adapting it to your market. "Formulas don't work for everyone," Smith cautions. "It's only a good formula if the recipe is right."

Finally, don't expect instant results.

At Jewelsmith in Durham, NC, guests do purchase the custom pieces during the annual holiday cocktail party. But that is usually just the beginning of its effect on sales.

"It becomes a game with couples," says Mary Katherine Moore, administrative manager at Jewelsmith. "She picks out what she wants, and he takes notice of it, and then there is a rush to make the purchase. It creates some buzz and some excitement about holiday shopping."

MEN'S NIGHT



Nelson Holdo of Asanti Fine Jewellers of San Marino, CA, has hosted a pre-holidays men's poker night in his store for about eight years, usually on the third Thursday of October, with an emphasis on cigars, red meat and models.

"It's a real stag night," Holdo says. "We thought if we could offer them a fun activity that was not really jewelry related it would overcome their threshold resistance."

Robert Simon of Windsor Jewelers in Winston-Salem, NC, has partnered with businesses such as Hooters, a microbrewery and car dealerships for his men's poker night. "For a men's night it needs to be entertainment driven, and sales will come from the good time."

THE CONCEPT > Offer top clients store credit to play poker.

Holdo gives each \$250 in credit. If they run out, they can buy back into the game with cash.

INVITATIONS > E-vite 500 of your best male customers a month before. Cut off the guest list at the first 100 who RSVP.



Nelson Holdo and models preside over men's poker night, which has become an October tradition.



Top: Playing for store credit at Asanti Fine Jewellers. Middle: Browsing at Benari Jewellers' men's night. Bottom: Spinning the roulette wheel at Windsor Jewellers.

WHEN > 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. on a weeknight.
EQUIPMENT > Poker table tops to place over rented tables, chips, logo playing cards, a bar.



MENU > Burgers — no need for fancier fare.

REFRESHMENTS > Open bar ideal.

PERSONNEL > Store sales staff. Models, models and more models: to show jewelry, to tend bar, to deal cards, to flirt.

Valet parkers. Food servers. Photographer.

DECORATIONS > None. "These are guys. They just need eye candy," Holdo says.



GIFT BAGS > Not necessary, but if you do, give away a cigar cutter or a deck of cards.

ENTERTAINMENT > iPod-generated tunes.

THE GAME > Texas Hold 'Em

THE PAYOFF > The chips can be spent only that night, so before

they go home the guys use or lose their credit. Typically they spend twice what they have in chips, Holdo says.

WHY IT WORKS > "There is a camaraderie that develops and feeds on itself," Holdo says. "There is a competitiveness in what these guys get each other to spend."



UP THE ANTE > Consider "dressing" the models completely in body paint and drape them in pearls and jewels, says Deborah Elias, owner of Elias Events in Houston.

THE RESULT > "We have it early enough in



Men mingle with Mini Coopers at Windsor Jewellers.

the season so that they will typically give their wives or girlfriends the jewelry that night rather than wait till Christmas." A bonus is that they will usually return before Christmas.

PARTNER WITH OTHER BUSINESSES >

Windsor Jewellers has hosted a gambling-themed men's night. A local Mini Cooper dealer brought several Minis, which were parked inside the store. A men's clothing store wowed the crowd with a fashion show. While the guys gambled in the casino with



"Windsor Dollars," waitresses from Hooters served wings, and beer was supplied by a local microbrewery.

PAMPER THEM > Jenna McIver of Benari Jewellers in Exton, PA, says the top prize

in a drawing at Benari's men's night last year was a \$6,500 Rolex. Guys were also treated to straight-razor shaves, microbrewery tastings and hand-rolled cigars.

LADIES' NIGHT

Julia Gardner of David Gardner Jewelers in College Station, TX, says in the past few years her typical female customer has gone beyond "wishing" for jewelry to buying it herself. So the Gardners have shifted the focus of ladies' night to designers and collections. At a David Yurman party, for example, customers brought their Yurman pieces to be cleaned as they shopped for new, coordinating pieces.

At Benari Jewelers in Exton, PA, the focus is on "hugging our customers," says Jenna McIver, marketing coordinator. And although they have a computerized wish-list system, that is not the be-all and end-all of their ladies' night, which drew 225 guests last year to the 5,000-square-foot store. "I say, more power to independent women who want to buy it themselves. Our main concern is to make sure that all of the ladies have a wonderful time and to showcase the jewelry."



David Gardner is accustomed to his role as congenial host.

THEMES > At David Gardner Jewelers, the theme was pairing. Invitations read: "Two of our favorite pairs: David Yurman and David Gardner. And wine and cheese." At Benari Jewelers, last year's theme was "An Evening in Paris." This year's theme is "Hollywood Glamour." Decorations fit the theme: Last year, an Eiffel Tower; this year, a red carpet. Sales staff will wear gowns and tuxedos.

DAY > Tuesday or Thursday evening.

INVITATIONS> Direct mail then e-mail.

FOOD> **Benari Jewelers:** Catered fine (bite-size) French cuisine and French wine tasting. **David Gardner:** Wine and cheese stations and jewelry-cleaning stations were set up throughout the store.

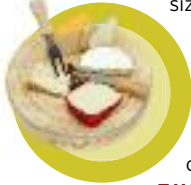
BEVERAGES> Wine, champagne and sparkling water.

THE GIVEAWAY> **David**

Gardner: Guests took home a hand-painted glass used in the wine-tasting. **Benari**

Jewelers: A goodie bag supplied by jewelry vendors and valued at \$150; an Hermes scarf. Live sunflowers, individually wrapped, to fit the Parisian theme.

MUSIC> Classical guitar or sound system.



At David Gardner Jeweler's David Yurman event, guests took home handpainted wine glasses and enjoyed wine and cheese pairings.

ENTERTAINMENT> **David Gardner:** A local stylist met with customers to talk about their face shape, their style and what type of Yurman wearer they are. **Benari Jewelers:** A fashion show; a mime greeted the guests; French music played on the sound system.

RAFFLE> **Benari Jewelers:** A Cartier watch.

LOW-KEY SALES

STRATEGY> **Benari Jewelers:** A photographer took photos of the guests wearing their favorite pieces of jewelry. The photos were framed and given to the guests to take home.

ANOTHER IDEA> Ladies night at Simon Jewelers, High Point, NC: "Six weeks before the Christmas season, we hosted a Make A Wish List Evening, featuring Lecil Henderson debuting his Chocolate Brown Gold Collection. To open the impulse window, we had black-tie wait staff serve chokolatinis and custom chocolate delicacies. By the end of the evening, we had accumulated a basket of wish lists, several new customers and many unexpected purchases." — Owner Gary Simon



David Gardner Jewelers celebrated its 25th anniversary with the theme, "Thankfulness is a Frame of Mind." Guests were photographed holding the frame.

A COCKTAIL PARTY

A cocktail party for hundreds may seem daunting. But Mary Katherine Moore, administrative manager of Jewelsmith in Durham, NC, suggests focusing on the jewelry. "Other things should be peripheral and add to the enjoyment of the jewelry. The bottom line is either to sell or to show your jewelry, so if the party becomes too much about other things, then you've kind of shot yourself in the foot, so to speak."

CHOOSE A DATE> Jewelsmith moved its party from December to November and watched attendance increase.

THEME> David Gardner Jewelers celebrated its 25th anniversary with the theme "Thankfulness is a Frame of Mind." Framed invitations were delivered by hand.

INVITATIONS> E-vites are fine. Promote it on Facebook, too. Send out a reminder one week before the event.



DECORATING> Use plants rather than flowers, as a "green" option, says wedding and party planner JoAnn Gregoli of [Elegant Occasions in New York](#).

VALET> A must. Make parking a breeze.

GREETERS> A local theater company in costume has greeted guests at David Gardner Jewelers in College Station, TX. Every guest has a photo taken, and the follow-up thank-you note includes the photo.

GLASSWARE> Use quality glasses, and if needed, silverware. "It feels like you are actually at a party at someone's home rather than being given a plastic cup because you might drop it," says Moore of Jewelsmith.





BEVERAGES > Wine, or add one specialty drink. Mojitos are popular, but they require some bartending skill, says party planner Deborah Elias of Elias Events in Houston. Champagne

is easier. Or make up your own drinks, and name them after jewelry designers, Gregoli suggests. Or partner with a local wine merchant, who can provide some education. Think quality, not quantity, to make a good impression, and find wines that don't need to be partnered with a heavy meal.



JewelrySmith's annual November party attracts hundreds of fans.

WAITERS > Have waiters circulate with drinks, rather than staffing a bar. It cuts down on lines and congested aisles.

FOOD > Waiters can also pass the canapés — make sure they are one-bite size and not greasy. Fresh fruit and cheese work well. Napkins should be available, of course, but shouldn't be necessary.



MUSIC > Anything from a sound system, an opera singer or an eight-piece swing band could work, if you have the space. But don't let the entertainment overpower the event, says Gregoli.

David Gardner's parties have featured a grand piano being played outside under a large porte-cochere.

TRAFFIC FLOW > It's tough to accommodate hundreds of customers at a time, so you need places for guests to chat and get away from the crowd. "We had dancing in a little outdoor courtyard area, and that worked beautifully for traffic flow," Moore of JewelrySmith says.

SPEECHES > Keep announcements to a minimum, Elias of Elias Events recommends. Your guests are not in the mood for anything long-winded.

ENTERTAINMENT > Partner with a fashion designer or clothing company to put on a casual fashion show, complemented by jewelry. Or go interactive: David Gardner once held a dance contest after a university dance team led the crowd in learning the hustle.

A FAMILY OPEN HOUSE



Bill Nusser Jr., owner of Hands Jewelers in Iowa City, IA, has established "Cookies and Carats," as a community Christmas tradition. His family open house often attracts 300 people over four hours and results in six-figure sales. "The original intent was to make people know we had extended our hours for the holidays. We get a lot of leads from that day," Nusser says. "It's one of the few times that you can actually get families in the store together, and that sparks a lot of ideas. We create dreams and a lot of people fulfill those dreams."

THEME > Nostalgic Christmas.

DAY > Sunday afternoon, Thanksgiving weekend.

DECORATIONS > All-out Christmas. A Christmas tree is decorated with the store's trademark bows. A window designer develops a fantasy theme in the store windows.

INVITATIONS > Handmade and hand-lettered by a local artist/calligrapher, they include a detachable calendar highlighting Hands Jewelers' holiday hours.

ENTERTAINMENT > Bow-making demonstrations. Hands Jewelers is known for its signature bows. "A girl came to our open house when she was 6 or 7 and when she turned 14, she worked here. It was her dream to be a bow person here."



TRUE TALE

Bringing families together: "A mother and daughter were not getting along very well at all, and they both signed up for our bow-making demonstration, and it really brought them together, all those tensions disappeared," says Bill Nusser Jr., owner of Hands Jewelers. "I got a sweet letter from the mother, who said it was the pivotal event to being able to relate better to her daughter."



Lazare Diamond's million-dollar jacket was one attraction at Hands Jewelers' Cookies and Carats party.



MUSIC> Christmas music, often recorded or composed by local artists, playing on a sound system.



FOOD> Frosted sugar cookies on silver trays

BEVERAGES> Cider and eggnog

CARAT ATTRACTIONS>

"Lazare Diamonds loaned us a \$1 million jacket with 360 carats of diamonds sewn into the ruffles of the jacket. We let people try on the jacket and have their picture taken in it — but we found out later we weren't supposed to. They had to redo the jacket. Still, it gave them so much publicity and name awareness."

OTHER FAMILY-FRIENDLY IDEA 1>

Every afternoon starting Black Friday through Christmas, snow blows from Llyn Strong's above-the-store residence, creating the rare sight of a winter wonderland in temperate Greenville, SC. While the children play outside, parents are welcomed into the cider-scented store to shop and enjoy a steaming mug of coffee, spiced cider, or a flute of bubbly.



Llyn Strong says let it snow in Greenville, SC.

OTHER FAMILY-FRIENDLY IDEA 2>



Cathy Calhoun's gingerbread-house contest has become such a smash that it's nearly outgrown her store, Calhoun Jewelers in Royersford, PA. Members of a local culinary institute design and create houses,

according to a theme Calhoun announces — fairy-tale castles, historical buildings in the area, churches, buildings in Washington, DC, etc. Customers who vote on their favorites get a chance to win a diamond, and the artists themselves have a shot at a \$1,000 scholarship. "It's a goofy idea that turned out to be huge," she says.

COLLECTOR'S DINNER



When Manfredi Jewels in Greenwich, CT, expanded in 2008 to 3,300 square feet, owner Roberto Chiappelloni made certain there would be room for entertaining, including a kitchen suitable for a chef and a table that sits 18 comfortably. Chiappelloni regularly makes use of that space, inviting watch collectors to four-course meals complete with a presentation from a watch industry celebrity, and hands-on opportunities to see and touch (and in one case, disassemble) the newest introductions from the world's finest watch companies.

INVITATIONS> This is special. No E-vites. Have them printed.

GUEST LIST> 10 to 14

VALET PARKING> Mandatory.

COCKTAIL HOUR> Guests mingle and chat and snack on shrimp, crab cakes and stuffed mushrooms.

ON THE MENU> Lasagna, rack of lamb or sea bass, at Manfredi. Houston party planner Deborah Elias of Elias Events says that if there's a dual entree, it should be a combination of land and sea: Steak and shrimp, for example. Provide a vegetarian option.



BEVERAGES> Vintage wine, port wine, cognac.

ADDED VALUE> The focus has always been on the guest speaker, Chiappelloni says. "We don't just say, come and we'll show you a bunch of watches." Often the speakers are watch industry legends, and the previews are among the first in the world.

Money-Saving Tips:

It's always best to have a caterer do it all — from linens to liquor. But if finances are an issue, buy discount liquor and have a staffing company serve it, rather than buying the liquor from a caterer. Buy fresh flowers from a wholesaler and arrange them yourself.

— **Deborah Elias** of Elias Events in Houston, TX





At Manfredi Jewelers, collectors enjoy comparing watches, left; talking about watches, right; and even disassembling watches, below. Often, the featured speakers are watch-industry legends.



MUSIC > Piano player or solo guitarist. "One of our employees is an opera singer so he can belt out a beautiful song," Chiappelloni says.

STAFFING > The catering company provides waiters, a bartender and a chef, and food is prepared fresh in the store.

CATERER > Hire one *now*. If your budget allows, ask the caterer to handle everything from chair and table rentals to glassware, linens and silver, staffing and alcohol.



CENTERPIECES >

Incorporate jewelry into centerpieces, Elias suggests. Use a stretch, beaded bracelet or strands of freshwater pearls to loosely gather the napkins.

SEATING > One long table works best for an intimate dinner, says JoAnn Gregoli, owner of Elegant Occasions of New York.

GIFTS FOR THE GUESTS > A cashmere



scarf, a professional watchmaker's toolkit, a wallet, corkscrews, a loupe or a cigar case. Often, a watch partner provides a gift bag for the guests at Manfredi. Or pair each course of the meal with a wine selection and give guests a bottle of one of the wines as a party favor, Elias suggests.

SALES STRATEGY > "Build a relationship with your client so that they don't feel trapped when they are in the store, and make it something of value that is not just another trunk show," Chiappelloni says. "Yes, we do these things for a reason and we hope that they make a purchase, but we want them to meet fellow collectors, meet the master watchmaker, have a fabulous dinner. At the end of the evening nobody will be approaching you to see if you placed an order."

JEWELRY CLEANING EVENT

A simple jewelry-cleaning event drew 300 people to Shaw & Sons Family Jewelers, a small store in Canal Winchester, OH, which celebrated its 40th anniversary with "A Sparkling Affair," in November 2008. Christmas 2007 had been a tough one, and Jim and Vicki Shaw had begun updating their inventory, adding more inexpensive items to the mix for Christmas 2008. They wanted to find a way to draw a crowd early in the season to show off their new merchandise.



IDEA > The Shaws, who have a 25-year business relationship with the Kingswood Co., learned about the company's in-store event that focuses on jewelry cleaning. An area would be set up in the store for guests to have their jewelry professionally cleaned. Customers would also be taught how to care for it themselves and be given a gift bag of Kingswood



Co. jewelry-cleaning products, under the Shaws' private label. "Our goals were to show people a good time and to sell," Jim says.



EXECUTION > The Shaws began planning the event two months in advance. They mailed 1,000 invitations and distributed by hand another 250. They worked with the bakery next door, Miss Marcie's, to provide holiday

treats, and recruited their own staff to help clean up, organize and decorate the store, with luminaries guiding customers to the front door. They hired a security guard for the evening and served champagne and sparkling cider.

REWARDS > Three hundred people attended the event on a snowy evening, generating traffic and buzz. "There is no question that it brought us goodwill from our customer base



Shaw & Sons Family Jewelers attracted 300 people on a snowy day last year by hosting the jewelry-cleaning event, A Sparkling Affair.

and in the community," Vicki says. According to Jim, "We really needed something to spice things up. Our customers enjoyed the evening and they walked away with a gift bag of our private-label fine jewelry cleaner, the knowledge of how to care for their jewelry and lots of ideas for holiday gifts."

TRY IT YOURSELF > Begin planning early and have plenty of extra staff on hand: "There's a certain amount of good psychology in having the large group, but it was a little harder to service everyone because it was really crowded," Jim says. Vicki suggests sending out invitations with staggered times to create a more orderly influx. "We ended up with so many people all at one time, so we could not take care of everyone," she says. "That was also a factor in not selling much that night because it was hard for them to get to a showcase to even look."

FOR SUPPLIES > The Kingswood Co.'s solutions for cleaning and polishing jewelry are available in conjunction with A Sparkling Affair events (\$535 to \$1,225) that include cleaning products by the gross, polishing cloths, marketing materials, instructions for a successful event — and even champagne. Information: www.thekingswoodcompany.com or (800) 848-3582.

A SPARKLING AFFAIR

THE JEWELRY CLEANING EVENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

ONE-TWO MONTHS BEFORE

- Pick a date and put together a budget.
- Order your Private Label Jewelry Care Products from The Kingswood Company. Make sure you have all products on hand, because a variety of jewelry has different cleaning needs.
- Brainstorm with your staff on a giveaway.
- Select and put together a mailing list of customers and potential customers.
- Market to your local women's groups, Junior League, church groups, etc.
- Send a press release to your local newspaper.
- Contact your local news station.
- Plan food, music, beverage and decorations. Keep it simple.
- Create a schedule of clinics throughout the day/week for the invitation, such as how to care for your pearls, what is the difference between hard and soft stones, how to mix and match the jewelry in your wardrobe, etc.
- Create a follow-up strategy that includes notes and calls.
- Take the invitation to the printer.
- Post the event on Facebook and Twitter with follow-ups leading to the day

TWO WEEKS BEFORE

- Send out invitations
- Start training your staff for the clinics and sale and cross-sale opportunities
- Order snacks, drinks and other provisions.

THE WEEK BEFORE

- Follow-up phone calls from your sales staff.
- Hire a calling service to make calls for you.
- Have a training session with your sales staff on how to care for jewelry,



including how and when to use a polishing cloth, how to use different parts of the polishing cloth, when to use an ultrasonic.

Additional training: Concentrate on cross-sell opportunities that may arise, pricing on repairs and types of repairs that may be needed.

THE DAY BEFORE

- Start setting up.
- Get a guest book so you know who came and was interested.
- Have the store professionally cleaned, maybe even the carpet.

THE DAY OF

- Greet everyone at the door.
- Place the emphasis on caring for their purchases.
- Watch your sales staff and help them with cross-sell opportunities.
- Make sure they are looking for repairs that need to be done

THE DAY AFTER

- Follow up on Facebook and Twitter, thanking those who attended and extending another invitation to those who missed it.
- Start implementing your follow-up plans.