

# THE CLAIRE DIARIES



4TH QUARTER 2008

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First and foremost I HAVE to start with the Olympics. I have to tell you it was one of the best work experiences I have ever had. Being in a semi communist country, working the top athletic event in the world, for one of the best companies was such an incredible experience. You want to talk about challenges – let me tell you there were lots of them which Coke handled with class, grace and elegance. I teased and said the weather in Florida and the atmosphere of the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee had a lot in common. You didn't like something just wait 10 minutes and it will change. For those of you who are interested I did blog everyday about my experiences and it can be found at – <http://rxforcatering.com/2008/07> (July) and <http://rxforcatering.com/2008/08> (August).

For those of you who don't want to read the blog – I will give some quick highlights

The Chinese don't have caloric counts on their food labels – no real surprise here – so when McDonalds put the caloric counts on their containers for the restaurant they had in the Olympic compound the local Chinese staff were absolutely fascinated. You couldn't even begin to put a french fry in your mouth without them telling you how many calories you were consuming. With this commentary all the sudden the french fries didn't taste so good.

I am going to stereotype here and say everyone should have a Chinese CPA they are all so good with math it is unbelievable. No one does a more accurate and speedy inventory than these folks. I was always grateful for their skills because we were doing product inventory on a daily basis of 31 coolers of Coke.

The one of many experiences that I will always remember is that – as strangers – the 9 local Chinese on the F & B staff is how well they all got along. These folks never gossiped, bickered or talked behind each others backs. It isn't in any of their nature which I thought was amazing. The staff truly cared about one another and respected each other. I continually saw them each go out on a limb for one another. They never got jealous if one got something and the other didn't. We wouldn't see that in the states. Also they don't own a whole lot nor do they think to want on a level like we do here. No one on our staff had a car and I don't think any of them had their driver's license.

PINS PINS and more PINS – if anyone thought pin trading was big at other Olympics – I can tell you the Chinese took it to another level. They would descend on people like swarms of bees when people had pins to trade. Wan Tu – who was the F & B lead, was so nice; she would make sure the F & B staff got Coke pins to trade when they were working the Coke hospitality tent at the IOC.

Then if that isn't enough I got to go back to Shanghai to work for another client and this is what I learned.

What was frustrating was our CSM and banquet manager at the Sheraton did a good job speaking English. This is tricky as this happens a lot internationally. They speak English well enough that when you are talking with them they lead you to believe they understand what you are saying. The reality of the situation is they don't. I would explain how I wanted something set up to the banquet manager; he would agree – tell me he understood and then I would come back to not have it done. I would explain it again and again and again and again. Then it occurred to me he is bullshitting his way through letting me think he understands. Same with our CSM. This was incredibly frustrating as it

would have saved a lot of time if these folks would not act like they knew as much English as they did. It would have been much easier to have it translated and get it right the first time.

In China their level of professionalism was incredible. You walk into a grocery store when it opens and everything is spic and shine even – all the employees are in their uniforms at the end of each aisle – bowing to you as you walk by. When this happened I KNEW I wasn't in America.

When eating in China the Chinese never use their fingers to eat. Everything is picked up with chopsticks. Since I am clumsy as clumsy can be with chopsticks it was fascinating to me to watch how effortlessly they would pick up all types of food and balance it between these 2 narrow pieces of wood.

When going over to China and you want to bring some candies for the Chinese I don't recommend chocolate. The American chocolate is too sweet for them and many of them don't like it. I bought over sour fruit candies like Jolly Ranchers and Starbursts and that went over much better than the chocolate.

Back in the USA I was walking through a grocery store with my father when we came upon this incredible fresh bakery section. Dad decided to buy some bread and have the lady run it through the slicer. She said with this type of bread the thinnest it could be sliced would be a number "3". What I learned is that the thickness of the slices are actually done by numbers. A number 1 thickness is actually – a thinner slice of bread and a number 7 a pretty thick slice of bread.

My sister Lois does volunteer work with seeing eye dog puppies. She is a "substitute" dog trainer. She takes the dogs when people who keep these dogs in the first year need to take a vacation or just a puppy break. This is what she had to say about her weekend with Baja a 1 year old yellow lab.

"Well I had a puppy this weekend who I thought might be ready to bring into work...until I spent the weekend with her. Baha is an adorable yellow lab with a mind of her own. She is still very much a puppy...chewed through slippers, 2 CD's and a stack of newspapers. On the other hand, she did find a pair of socks under the bed. Girlfriend only listens when it's in her best interest, and within minutes of arriving quickly parked herself on the sofa. When I shoed her off the sofa, she promptly moved to the chair, and stayed there until Michael physically moved her off.

So we did a lot of walking, walking, walking...and to Baha's credit, she does go to sleep at 9:00 and sleeps through the night. Nothing says love like hearing the dog drink from the toilet bowl then come lick your face".

The past couple of months I have done a fair amount of work across the country with mom and pop off premise catering companies. What has been interesting is they do an AWFUL JOB with their contracts. I have had to go back to all of them and crab about their lack of communication in the contracting stage. Here are some issues that I had across the board.

- The menu pricing included disposables and even that wasn't always clear. No one did a nice plastic disposable most of them did the cheap Styrofoam. The least I would do is offer a nice thick plastic or bamboo disposable.
- No one included enough labor.
- They do not let the buyer know if they would like to upgrade to china, silver, or linen, or what are these charges
- Tables weren't included or even mentioned on the quote. Where exactly are people going to sit or what is the food going to go on?
- Last this was weird to me because they quoted a buffet menu that didn't include dessert. Isn't dessert part of the menu?

If this applies to you and you know who you are – please relook at how you are sending out your proposals. Should anyone have questions on this, you know where to find me.

**When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost;  
when character is lost, all is lost."  
- Billy Graham**

TRENDS – this is going to get interesting going into this economy. I don't think the trends are going to be with any particular food item. I think it is going to be with being creative with the food dollar that we as buyers have available to spend. I think that everyone is going to have to do their part to suck it up and make the best of this economically tight situation. I do see organic as it relates to banquets going by the wayside due to costs.

Ok but you insist on some new food suggestions – who am I to say no – I would like to see more with creative action stations – for example getting a convection oven and do a fresh cookie bar throughout the day; the placement of this in the coffee break area.

I hired this catering company who did a molten cake station. It was a Coca-Cola event and I worked with them on 3 different types of molten cakes with a couple of different toppings. For example, we did a chocolate molten cake with a Cherry Coke Center and raspberry coulis topping. This station was extremely popular and a great trend.

Fresh trendy culinary ideas –I do watch Top Chef. Many times these chefs create items that make no sense from a culinary perspective but every episode I manage to walk away with at least 2 or 3 ideas that are thoughtful and applicable.

Last trend: instead of adding a 4<sup>th</sup> course start with an Amuse Bouche – it gives the light flavoring of an added course with out the cost. I also like it because it allows the chef to do something seriously creative without a huge commitment if the eater doesn't like it since it is only 1 bite.

**"In the business world, the rearview mirror is always clearer than the windshield."  
- Warren Buffett**

I have said it before and I will say it again to save money do a buyout of a restaurant. You have more flexibility in negotiation, the price points are usually better and the décor is automatically built in. The one warning signal I will tell you – is GO OVER YOUR TIMING with a fine tooth comb. Especially if you are doing a sit down dinner. Most restaurant chefs do not have banqueting experience so they don't have a great sense of timing with a dish out as a banquet chef.

I almost learned this the hard way. I was in Dallas the beginning of December doing a site inspection. My site wasn't until the next day and it is a buyout of a entertainment complex restaurant like a Dave and Busters only this wasn't D & B's. I got to town and went by myself the night before to have a looksie. This was a good thing because they were doing some private events and I could see it real time without the benefit of the sales rep. They had some pretty bad and unsanitary food displays that I didn't like. I don't know if I would have seen these things if I would have walked through with the sales rep. It also gave me more bargaining power for when we talked. Saving my client an additional \$1000.00 in venue rental.

This was a big crab I had when working a higher end resort in Orlando – I was doing a VIP dinner at \$115.00++ per plate BUT - I couldn't get them to give me a dessert that was worthy of a \$115.00 meal. Why? I don't know why. Catering managers when writing your menus make sure the quality and “interest” of the dessert is in alignment with the rest of your meal. To prove my point this is a very well qualified pastry chef and his best shot was a blueberry

cheesecake with a lemon curd sauce or an apple tart with ice cream and burnt caramel sauce. All boring and disappointing at the same time.

You know you gotta love a 4 year old. My brother Bruce has primary custody of his 2 daughters Emily and Olivia. Emily is 4 and Olivia is 6. He has a live – in nanny named Rosa. Rosa never calls my brother Dr. Gould or Dr. Bruce when she refers to him it is just the word “Doctor”. Doctor told me this; I did that for the Doctor. My niece Emily has taken a real shine to Rosa and just adores having her as a nanny. So it was really funny a couple of months ago when I had Emily and she looked up at me with her big blue eyes and sweet face to make it very clear to me – “The Doctor is not the boss of me”. I stifled a laugh and asked if she told this to The Doctor? She thought long and hard about it and said NO. I told her that might be wise to keep that between Aunt Claire and herself. I didn't The Doctor would find this line of thinking very popular.

I did a VIP event in Boca Raton Florida in September. The off – premise caterer that I hired I was pleasantly surprised with – the food was really good. But where they fell short on was this was their first event of the season. Their banqueting staff had been off for awhile. They came back to work this VIP event and were rusty. This led to some unprofessional behavior and the lack of training that showed during the event. When hiring an off prem company that has seasonality like this one in Florida ask the question regarding training prior to the event.

**"Every day I get up and look through the Forbes list of the richest people in America.  
If I'm not there, I go to work."  
-Robert Orben & Claire Gould**

Rx for Catering, LLC updates – Folks, I like the rest of the world am getting hit with the economy. Should you have any needs for my services now is the time to give Rx a try as we are a cost savings service that will give you a much better bang for your culinary dollar with out adding any expenses. I am in the finishing stages of giving my website a huge overhaul so please have a look at “Rx's new look”.

With Appreciation,

*Claire R. Gould*  
Owner  
Rx for Catering, LLC



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