



4TH QUARTER 2004

THE CLAIRE DIARIES

Welcome to the year-end version of The Claire Diaries. Taking it from the top, these are the things I have learned in the fourth quarter.

Something different to use in your planning this winter: DUMPLINGS. That is right, you heard it here first. How about a nice lunch of herb roasted chicken and sage dumplings? How about adding potatoes to the mix? The flexibility I like with dumplings is that they are so versatile...they can be used for meats, vegetables, potatoes and fruit, just take your pick.

Folks, as a reminder to those of you that are doing business over a weekend, remember to get a weekend number for vendors, especially for linen if your order is coming in on Friday for a Monday event. Always check immediately that your order is correct. I had problems recently with BBJ on a weekend order and their weekend number is basically in code, so make sure you get this information up front.

If you have a bottle of wine that has the term "Old Vine" on it, you might like to know that the words "Old Vine" are referring to the age of the vine that the grapes are grown on for that particular wine.

Does this make sense or what? The Marriott River center in San Antonio, TX does the obvious. The hotel management actually empowers their bellman to check in waiting guests if the front desk staff is busy with other guests. The scary thing about this is that it makes total sense. Actually putting the guest first with service? My next question: why aren't more hotels doing this?

For the first time this fall I started adding root beer (diet and regular) to my coffee breaks. As much as I love my Diet Coke, I get bored with the constants of Coke, Diet Coke and Sprite. Coke has a ton of products, folks—get a list of all their products and add them to the mix. People really like root beer but don't think about buying it, so it worked well having it available.

Dessert Trend: Drinkable desserts and adding spices to desserts. For example, I did a chipotle chocolate shooter at the 4 Seasons in Arizona. This didn't have alcohol in it—it was a chocolate with heavy cream and chipotle seasoning and drank like a shooter. This can be done with various fruits as well.

"Words which come from the heart enter the heart"...Anonymous

When doing activities at resorts such as a jeep or hummer tour...make sure the driver has a microphone on him. I have done two of these tours on site inspections this year and it is impossible to hear them as they are talking while driving.

While working in Arizona I learned that residents only get their driver's license renewed once every 35 years! Talk about a before and after picture.

HO, HO, NOT! Gift cards, my friend: that we all love to get gift cards so we can buy EXACTLY WHAT WE WANT, BUT be careful when you are buying someone a gift card as there are hidden costs that most givers have no idea they're foisting on family and friends. Many cards expire in as few as nine months, and some can be reactivated for a fee. Others can be dinged \$2.00 or more each month if the recipient doesn't use the card within a certain amount of time. A study shows that up to 20% of recipients of prepaid gift cards never tap the entire value of their cards. Courtesy of *Money Magazine*

I learned that in pre-planning it's important to ask to see what the banquet check looks like ahead of time. This way if you need to make any changes to how the check reads or how you do your reconciliation you can discuss it in the planning stages.

UPDATE ALERT! Check out the Rx for Catering, LLC website. It is now sporting the new logo and a few new pictures of events from the past couple of years. When you have a chance have a look at rxforcatering.com. Thanks!

May he rest in peace...country and western singer Jerry Scoggins, 93, who was famous for singing what? None other than the title song from the Beverly Hillbillies. Scoggins, a Texan stockbroker, moonlighted as a singer when he was approached to sing the famous "Ballad to Jed Clampet."

Very hip, very cool...do a caramel apple bar. Try big, fabulous caramel apples that come with several different toppings. It is my recommendation that this gets turned into a carving station per se, so if a guest wants to try three slices of three different apples they can.

Early December I went to Manaus, Brazil on a site inspection. This is what I learned:

- * Manaus is in the state of Amazonia, which is located in the Amazon (sorry for stating the obvious) in the very north of Brazil.
- * Our hotel is located on the Black River and it is black because of the vegetation that grows underneath. Besides being black, the vegetation has made the water very acidic. The upside of this river is the acidity of the water doesn't allow for the bugs to live in the environment.
- * The Amazon has fresh water dolphins—in PINK. No kidding, we saw dolphins that were cotton candy pink.
- * The main culinary fare is obviously FISH, but the fish from the Amazon are so much stronger than what we are used to eating. Yuck, I say.
- * We did a little bit of Amazon Fear Factor, and hats off to Kathy Phoenix for holding a boa constrictor (not wild, of course) and honorable mention goes to Randy for eating a fried fish head. My client lost miserably for “girl screaming.”
- * We didn't actually get to see much of the Amazon jungle. In order to really do that you need to take a boat or prop plane several hours into the jungle.

As we are all closing the book on 2004 and opening a fresh chapter to 2005, I would like to share some of my favorite quotes from the book “Live, Learn and Pass it On.”

“I have learned that hotel mattresses are better on the side away from the phone.” -Age 50

“I've learned that you can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk.” -Age 7

“I've learned that you shouldn't look back except to learn.” -Age 70

“I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.” -Age 64

“I've learned that if you allow someone to make you angry, you have let them conquer you.” -Age 54

“I've learned that there are still some things I haven't made up my mind about yet.” -Age 91

“I've learned that you shouldn't expect life's very best if you're not giving it your very best.” -Age 51

“I've learned that when I grow up, I am going to be an artist. It's in my blood.” -Age 8

“I have learned that days are long, but life is short.” -Age 88

So what did you learn this year?

Best wishes to all for a happy and healthy 2005.

Thank you all for your continued supporting in reading “The Claire Diaries.” Please feel free to pass The Diaries along.

Claire R. Gould