

Remember When

A PRE-PANDEMIC PARTY

BY ROBIN H. PHILLIPS // PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILY SIDOTTI

CUISINE BY ROSINNE CHALALA, FESTIVITIES CATERING

HAIR & MAKEUP BY GAVALI SALON, FLORALS BY FLOWERS BY MARNA

WELCOMING WARMTH Floral designer Marna Ringel created stunning bouquets with her favorite rose amnesia along with pink hypericum berries the dining room is filled with Lauf's special finds. She found the Parisian chandelier, circa 1940-50s, at an antique shop in Stamford and had it restored. The mahogany antique dining room table came from New Canaan's Silk Purse consignment shop.





The Lauf extended family is close-knit, and loves a chance to get together for great food, flowers, and wine. In March, when the pandemic hit, and Fairfield was under the Connecticut stay-at-home order, Dawn Lauf, felt wistful thinking about enduring so many weeks without seeing her family. “The quarantine is the longest we had ever gone without seeing one another,” explains Lauf. “Once we were allowed to social distance, we rose to the challenge of staying together and continuing visits with my mom. My sister rented a garage heater so that we could socially distance with my mom while still being a bit outdoors and also having enough room to be more than six feet apart. It worked great!” Nowadays, they still stick to the six-foot apart rule, and spend time together outside.

This is why Lauf treasures that much more the memory of the special dinner the family held a few months before the whole world changed. Lauf, who is Lebanese-American, was excited to make a festive meal with a classic middle eastern twist. While she, her mom, and sisters all love to cook, they thought it would be helpful to ask friend Rosinne Chalala, also Lebanese-American, of Festivities Catering, to help prepare a few dishes for them so they could spend more time talking and less time working in the kitchen. Chalala created some classic Lebanese



COHESIVE COLOR STORY
The living room's transformation started with redoing the fireplace, paneling it, adding architectural details, the marble surround and antiqued mirrors. Sisters Doreen Goncalves and Susan Dimyan get ready to try some of Roe's bird's nest egg custard cups. The Laufs transformed the kitchen from a typical 80s stained oak kitchen to white cabinets and gray glass tile backsplash. They didn't change the footprint but reoriented the island, adding stools with a fun gray and white zebra print.





TASTES AND SIPS Dad Jay Lauf pours Lebanese wine for daughter Jordan. In his study, Jay chats with brother in law Michael Dimyan. Roe helps with the final plating and Dawn Lauf chats with mom, June Dimyan before dinner.

dishes for the meal, including Red Snapper stuffed with sliced lemons, thyme, salt and pepper, on a bed of tahini sauce and topped with sautéed onions and almonds and stuffed grape leaves and homemade Middle Eastern dips and spreads. “We are of Lebanese grandparents on both sides, and our heritage foods are part of us,” explains Chalala.

When you enter the Lauf home, a pretty colonial on a winding Greenfield Hill neighborhood street, it’s clear that the design flows, connecting each room and showcasing Lauf’s special talent for color and scale. “I have been helping friends, family, and a few clients for about four years now. I enjoy working with them to create cohesive plans for their homes where the rooms really relate to one another,” explains Lauf. “One of my best skills is picking paint colors and I find that most people really have a hard time with that. I am also good at finding unusual, inexpensive pieces that can truly finish a space. I like to mix old with new—like my vintage coffee table with Lillian August chairs. I don’t like everything to be store-bought new. I am also very good at decorating with any budget.”

All of this is evident in the soothing gray palette, with accents of lavender, that Lauf has imbued in her home. Living at the house for 23 years, the Laufs have redone every room in the house. “I remodeled the kitchen with the white and gray and then that poured over into redoing the rest of the house—creating a cohesive color story. Gray is a soothing color and it works with fun complimentary colors like lavender or blues,” she explains. “I also love working with the simplicity of an all-white or off-white room and black. I believe in picking a jumping off point with one room and carrying complimentary colors throughout the home.” A dear





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friend, Kelley Schutte, helped Dawn make some crucial decisions when it came to the dining room and living room furniture.

Drawn to a French Modern style herself, Lauf also loves to mix metals. In her dining room she showcases both silver and gold, along with heavier fabrics and darker grays. "Several of the projects I have worked on for others have a more rustic-boho vibe. I can adapt to any style and think people appreciate my flexibility and openness to not be stuck to any one look."

As for her heritage, it influences more than just the cuisine—it has also instilled in her a great respect for family tradition and support. "Both of my grandmothers came over from Lebanon when they were teenagers. My father owned a grocery store for many years in Danbury—Dimyan's Market—which had great produce, a butcher shop in the back, and middle eastern food items that you couldn't find elsewhere. My uncle owned a bakery nearby where he made all the Arabic/Pita Bread for the city of Danbury and beyond. Growing up every Sunday we would have a very large afternoon meal with all of our favorite Lebanese dishes," says Lauf.

The only thing missing from the evening were Lauf's younger daughter Caroline, who was away at school in Montreal, and another brother George who was away on business. "Any excuse to be with family is fine with me," says Lauf. "And we are committed to staying safe, while still being able to enjoy our loved ones." ■

