



Supper Club

BIRCHTREE CATERING EXPERIMENTS WITH NEW IDEAS AT ITS POP-UP DINNERS.

Allegra Derengowski and Rasa Stirbys Benefico started Birchtree Catering in 2008. With little background in catering, the pair, who met working as servers, hosted tastings for friends and family to practice and garner feedback on the food and service.

Years later in August 2014, the now-established company started Supper Club, a series of seasonal pop-up dinners, with the idea to cook once again for a small group of friends and foodies. Though these days, it's less to practice and more to experiment.

THE PLANNING

Supper Club takes place at a new Philadelphia venue for every dinner, with different vendors to match. "Once we have the space, the theme is chosen, generally by chef Rasa or in collaboration with the team. The venue may lead us to the French countryside or northern Italy, or a medieval feast, or artist's theme. The menu is sometimes driven by straightforward influences such as a region or flavor profile, and sometimes by shapes or colors that we want to experiment with," says Derengowski.

Birchtree works with furniture, photography, live music, floral and décor vendors to help create their vision. "Often a specific vendor will come to mind once we've chosen a theme. Other times, we have a list of people we want to work with and fit a theme around their strengths."

"We're always looking for new and different elements to include in Supper Club, and we had come across a rental company that created [Lazy Susans] as an answer to service issues they were seeing in the field. I was so impressed with the creativity of it, and that I hadn't seen it before at events, so I had to try it. They were as fun to use as they look," says Derengowski.

THE FOOD

"We've typically styled our service around small plates and family-style platters, as the multicourse aspect of these dinners is very important to the overall vibe," says Stirbys Benefico, who gives background on the inspiration and ingredients for each dish as it's presented.

Food and drinks are often paired together. At Yards Brewing Company, Birchtree paired beer flights with a "flight" of salad, poke and pâté. Courses were made to complement cocktails' flavor profiles. At Philadelphia Distilling, Birchtree complemented the cocktails with courses that played on the same flavor profiles; a chilled spring pea soup with herb poached rock shrimp, candied lemon rind and wasabi dust was created to go with the Lemon Hill cocktail, which features snap pea vermouth, sage and lemon.

THE TRENDS

"It's been really fun introducing our guests to some of our favorite trends in food, such as bringing attention to local foraged ingredients like nettles and ramps. We also bring in the interactive, dynamic service styles we're seeing—combining small plates and family-style service or composed plates that guests can make their own with some fun salts, sauces, herbs," says Stirbys Benefico.

"Supper Club keeps us infused with creativity, always looking for the next ideas or trends to try out. Stretching ourselves in this way gives us the expertise that we can bring to all of our events. ... It's also an emotional outlet that reminds us that bringing people to the table for food and conversation is the crux of what we do," says Derengowski.

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