

CATERING WINGS CLIPPED



*Twelve-course extravaganzas
are a thing of the past.
The new buzz words are budget,
comfort and basics*

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CATERING has come down market from its lofty heights in the 1980s, when themed 12-course extravaganzas for 100 were de rigueur among Forest Hill socialites.

Today's buzz words among purveyors of fine food are budget, comfort and basics.

"I used to knock out 60 for dinner routinely," says Allison Cumming, who has operated her own catering company in Toronto for nearly 15 years. "Parties were endless in 1988-1989 at the height of the boom years. Everything went crazy. Now it's back to normal. The informality of parties is big. Twelve-course dinners are passé without a doubt."

The eighties were full of hype. When you had a party, it was to impress your friends. In the nineties, you have a party to enjoy your friends.

The greedy show-off decade pushed people to ensure that every morsel of a meal was really trendy and different or risk social censure. Those were the years of chocolate-covered trout and charcoal-broiled filet with hot spicy kiwi sauce, created by chefs trying to outdo each other in originality.

"It always had to be something exotic," said Daniel Megly co-owner of Daniel et Daniel, which was founded in 1980. "This put a lot of pressure on people. It was hard on our customers to always choose something different. They could never relate to anything, because they had never tried the dishes before."

He feels the decade did, however, give people a sophistication and better understanding of food so now

they can relax and order with confidence what they really want.

"Now it is back-to-basics. People can order something that has a simple classic taste, feel good about it, and have their friends over, instead of blowing their brains out with something that sounds different and mixes all the flavours."

Mashed potatoes are just as fine, thank you, as are mini-vegetables and okra. Pass on the zucchini flowerettes and bring on the green salad. Shepherd's pie, beef bourguignon and blanquette de veau may have been around, but they are most welcome back.

Andrew Zimbel, chef and owner of the 10-year-old Amazing Food Service catering company, says that the movement to basics started in Paris two years ago where a chef is now famous for his mashed potatoes.

Megly, who says he was always raised to respect saving money, is happy with the nineties trend.

"People are much more conscious of prices, not wasting money. In the eighties, it was almost sickening. People were making lots of money without really working for it. And they just spent it, and it didn't really matter.

"Everything was a bit too much food. There's nothing wrong with trimming the menu a bit. It's healthier in fact."

Brian King, co-owner of Catering à la Carte, now in its 11th year, also sees a strong back-to-basics trend. Caterers had become special-event companies in their heydays, serving picnics in helicopters, spending thousands of dollars on floral arrangements, poaching salmon on

Please see CATER — D7