

Preparing for a Dinner Party

Last weekend we had a sit-down dinner party for 50 guests. We certainly don't have room inside for a crowd that large, but the orchard provides the perfect space for dining al fresco.

There are several reasons why we love to entertain. 1) It forces us to get things done around here. Naturally we want our home and property to look its best and I can honestly say, it doesn't look great all the time~~we are human and sometimes lazy; 2) We believe it's important to share our property and its history. There are so few of the original estate properties left in Phoenix and our house represents what life was like over 100 years ago; 3) It does take some work but we really enjoy it!

Years ago, I may have attempted the cooking myself, but now I call in my catering expert, [Julie Greder](#). Julie does not disappoint. Her food is delicious; her staff is warm and friendly; and her calm demeanor is just what I need as I am frantically rushing around before an event.

Naturally, I don't have tables, chairs and service for 50 so I count on [Party People](#) to provide the rental items I need. They, too, have a great selection and always deliver and pick up on time.

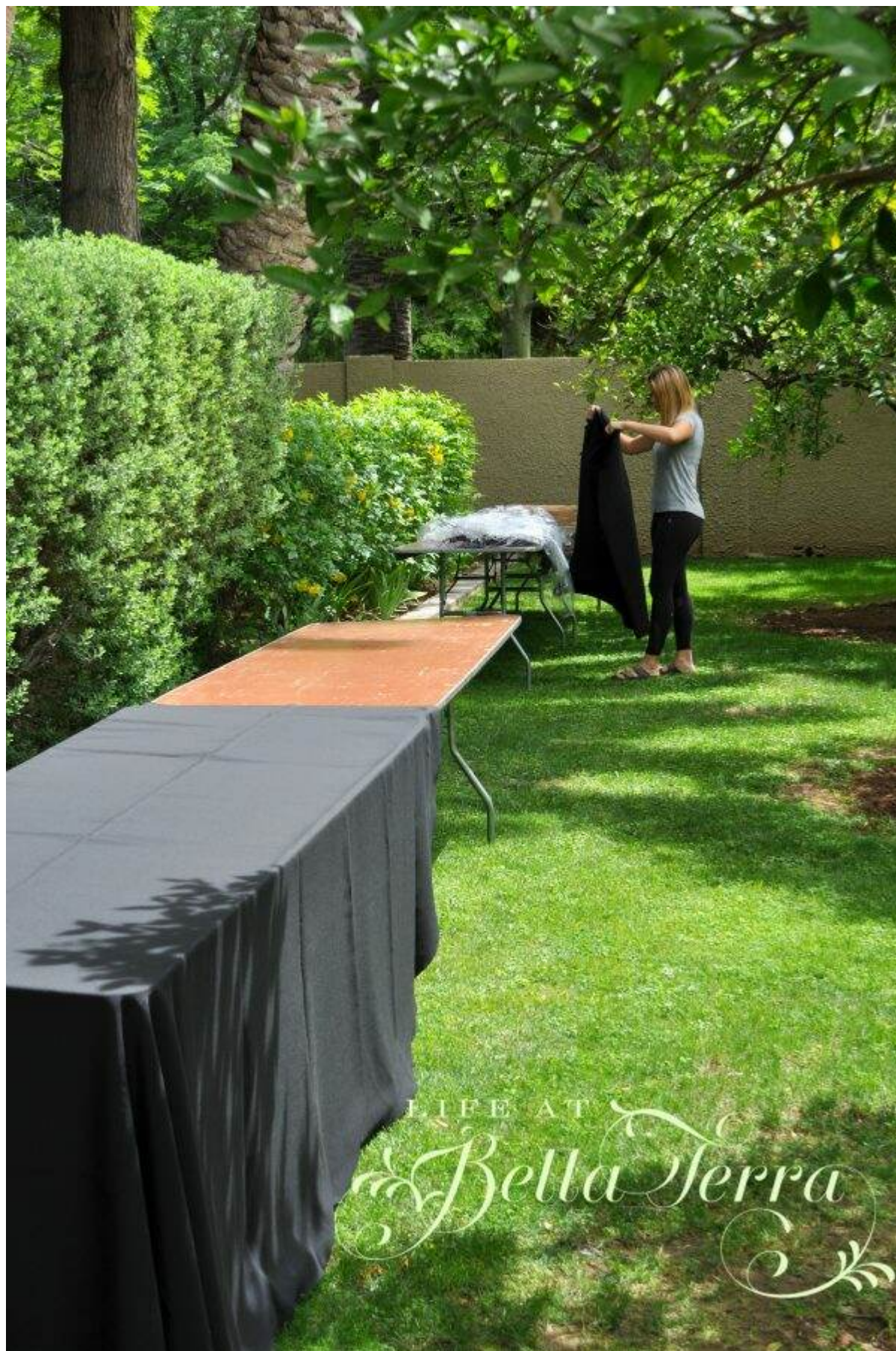




I envisioned the table to be “spring elegant” and tried a different color for the tablecloths and napkins...a sea foam blue. Since the orchard is narrow, one “long” table works best in the space (which was really 6 8’ tables lined up allowing for 24 chairs on each side and two at the ends).

Setting everything up is a challenge but I had the help of my dear friend and colleague, Linda Mateut from [Bonbon Macarons](#).

Linda has such a great sense of style and flair in addition to being so sweet and centered. In previous posts, I've mentioned Linda's fabulous French macarons which are better than any I have tasted in Paris. Plus, my sweet artistic daughter, Julianna, came home from college for the weekend and lent a helping hand.



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The morning of the event, Linda and I set up the tables with the help of Cooper and Sox. For some reason, these two

rascals love to play Hide and Seek, run under the tables and chase each other. Not so good for us, but great fun for them.

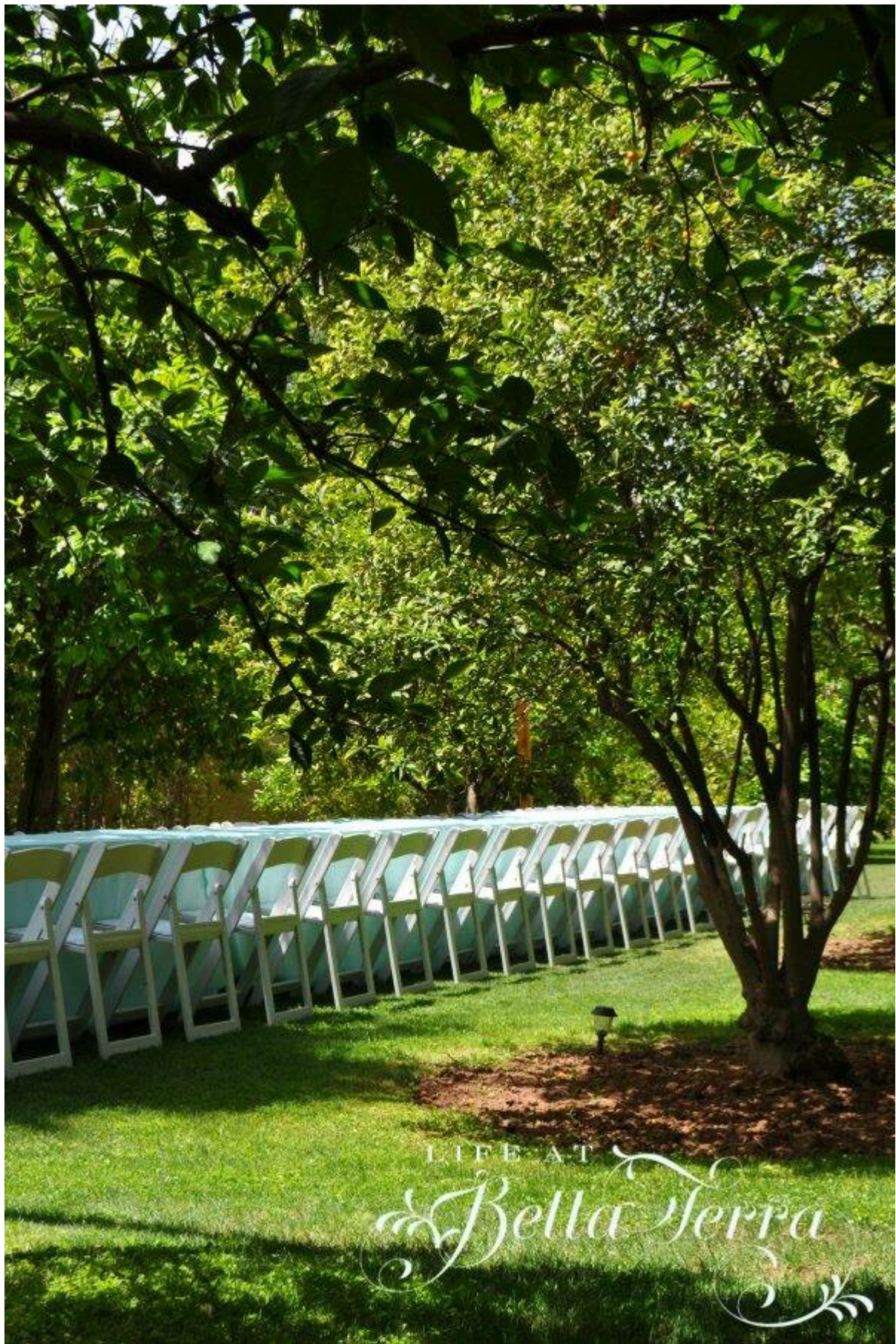


Since there were high winds predicted for the night of the event, I wanted to make sure both the flower arrangements and candles were weighted and secure and would not blow over.

Mason jars aren't the most elegant of vessels, but they are sturdy. I put the votives in a taller Mason jar so the wind wouldn't extinguish the flame. The flowers and candles added colorful beauty to the table and no one noticed the Mason jars.



Getting the tables, chairs and place settings aligned was important to the overall symmetry. Though we didn't do a Downtown Abbey and use a ruler, Linda took the time and extra effort to make sure it didn't look cattywampus.





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There were additional tables for the caterers to stage the food and to serve beverages. My daughters were responsible

for providing the background music.





After a glass of [Prosecco](#) and hors d'oeuvres on the front porch, we then proceeded to the orchard for dinner. To secure the napkins we used a simple ribbon and a sprig of fresh rosemary. Julie had menus printed with the evening's fare.



The strings of lights and the candles provided the warm ambiance and plenty of lighting for dining.





Our guests were from [The Peregrine Fund](#), a non-profit organization that my husband has been involved in over 20 years. They had a strategic planning meeting here in Phoenix and we had the opportunity to host them for dinner. The Peregrine Fund has been researching, conserving habitat and restoring species of birds of prey since 1970. We need birds of prey in order to ensure the health of the world's ecosystem. The Peregrine Fund educates students, the public and communities around the world about conservation. They have an earned reputation of saving all kinds of raptors. Here is a peregrine falcon who is an educational bird of prey from The Peregrine Fund's [World Center for Birds of Prey](#) in Boise, Idaho. Isn't he a beauty?



So you can imagine, much to my surprise, when we had an unexpected dinner visitor who happen to land on a branch very close to the table~~our very own bird of prey!

This is a Western screech owl with a Sphinx moth in its mouth! The little guy sat on that branch and posed for such a long

time for our guests. Pretty amazing..



The dinner was a great success and we always feel so honored to have those who have traveled far and wide, experience an evening at Bella Terra. It was a winning combination: great weather, fabulous food, interesting and engaging participants, a good cause and one screech owl who, if you look closely, brought his own dinner!

Here is the menu Julie and her fabulous team prepared:

The Peregrine Fund Dinner

Salad

Fresh arugula, tomatoes, pine nuts, shaves of Parmesan with shallot vinaigrette

Entree

Salmon with lemon butter caper sauce and asparagus

Filet Mignon with red wine reduction and garlic mash

Dessert

Key Lime Tart with graham cracker coconut crust and fresh
cream

Happy Friday!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mary".