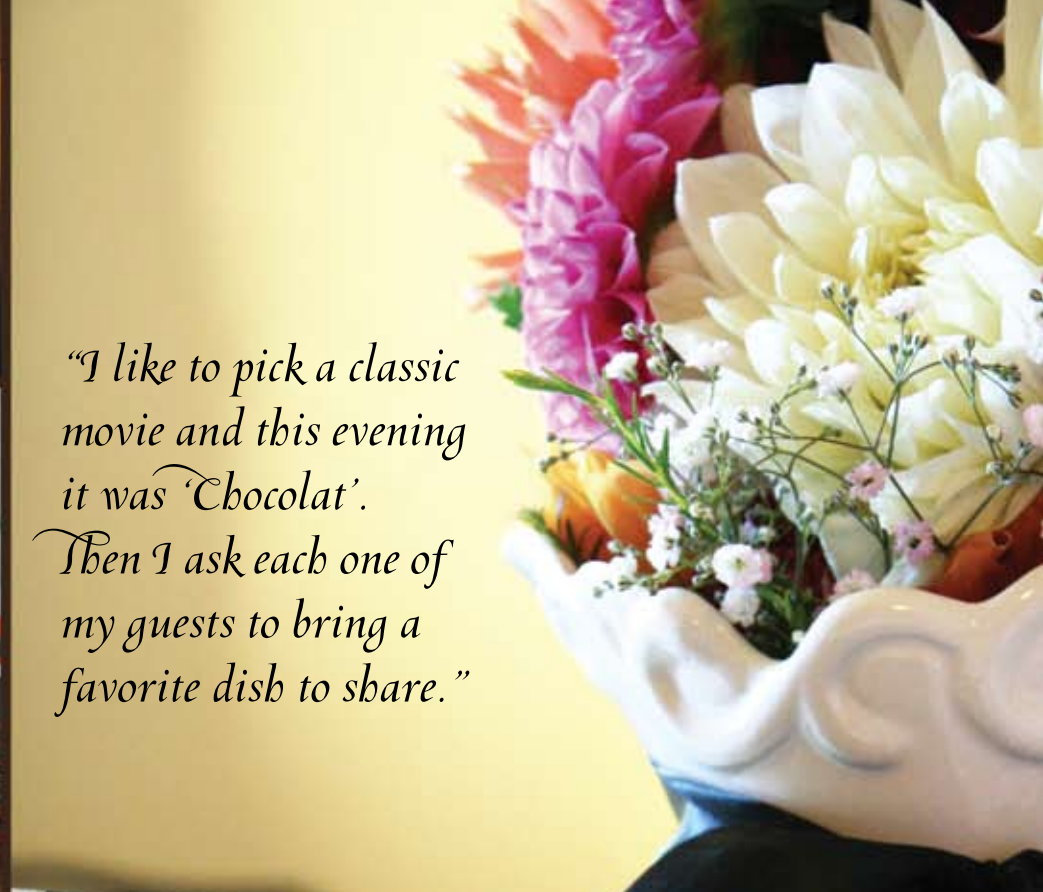
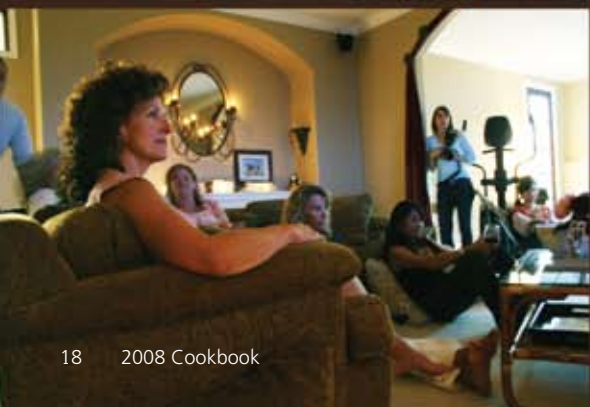


# Girls *Night-in!*

by Mari Robeson



Join entertaining editor Mari Robeson as she prepares a fabulous party for friends who share their signature dishes.



*"I like to pick a classic movie and this evening it was 'Chocolat'. Then I ask each one of my guests to bring a favorite dish to share."*





Erma Bombeck once said, “Most women put off entertaining until their kids grow up,” and I find a bit of truth in that. With three daughters who have lots of friends, I’m constantly picking up and cleaning, but that’s really no excuse to put off entertaining! Your real friends don’t care if there is a stain on the carpet from a spilled juice box. I know mine don’t! I love people, food and sharing, more than I care if everything is perfect.

Those friends have blessed my life and are incredible women with a wide range of experiences and backgrounds. One of my

favorite things to do is invite a few women over who may or may not know one another and watch how new friendships begin and grow. A simple and easy way to get together is a “movie night.”

I like to pick a classic movie and this evening it was “Chocolat.” Then I ask each one of my guests to bring a favorite dish to share. For instance, if I’m showing an Italian movie, I would ask each guest to bring an Italian dish.

The dress for the evening is always casual. One has to be comfortable enough to grab a floor pillow and relax.

You can really have fun with the theme of your movie, starting with the invitations all the way to the parting gifts. Begin with a “save the date” e-mail to each of your guests at least three weeks beforehand. Then, two weeks prior to your party send out your hard copy. I actually found an online company that will print your invitation on a real movie ticket, but you can easily make them yourself.

Even though each of your guests is bringing a delicious treat, always plan on making the main dish as well as various items to nibble on. In my case, my girlfriends told me





what they were bringing so it was easy to fill in the rest. Because the night was casual, I planned on making paninis, grilled Italian sandwiches. My husband, Bill, is an amazing chef, so even though it was “Girl’s Night-in” he was gracious enough to make all the sandwiches while my niece Shaunah, helped with the appetizers. It’s especially helpful if you have a friend or family member who can help you with the food. It will free you up to introduce your guests to one another. I also suggest keeping it fairly small. I find eight to 10 people works beautifully.

Prior to my girlfriends’ arrival, I had a great time decorating. This is really inexpensive, too. I went to Office Max and bought a roll of “Admit One” raffle tickets. I also purchased black and white ribbon from our local Michaels. Earlier that day I went to the Arroyo Grande Farmer’s Market (held on Wednesday mornings and Saturdays at noon) and purchased strawberries for chocolate-covered strawberries and lots and lots of flowers. I gathered up my vases and started creating. I also used my tickets to make nametags for each wine glass. I add a description of each person to their tag, i.e. “Jazzy Julie” or “Stunning Stacy.” Silly, I know, but fun!

When guests arrive I start off with a welcome cocktail to set the mood for the evening. This evening I invented a little aperitif called my “Welcome Kiss.” I blend equal parts of Disaronno & Baileys Irish Cream then top with whip cream and a chocolate kiss. Delicious!

Everyone has a chance to mingle and meet one another over appetizers and a glass of wine. We settle in for a casual dinner. Stories are told that make everyone crack up. There is nothing like getting eight or so very clever and witty women together! I almost felt guilty about starting the movie.

In my family room I had homemade popcorn ready and waiting. I found great little bags and accessories at World Market in San Luis Obispo and a lovely little party store called Pismo Beach Party & Costume.

During the movie my really good friend, Stacy, snuck away to make chocolate martinis for everyone. Oh my goodness! They were so delicious! We watched the movie and relaxed but I have to say the hilarious commentary from dinner continued throughout the movie, which means I definitely need to rent the movie again!

When the movie was over, as if we hadn’t had enough to eat, there was dessert. Chocolate mousse tart, chocolate soufflé, chocolate “Crazy Mom on the run” Cheesecake, and Cindy’s Figilicious stuffed figs! Yum! It was the perfect way to wind down the evening. As we said our good-byes, I gave each one of my guests a little gift in these adorable movie night bags. I think it’s always a good idea to show potluck guests your gratitude with a parting favor. Mine was simple as a candle, popcorn, candy and: a copy of *Live Artfully Magazine!*

I really appreciated that my friends allowed

### Hot & Spicy Artichoke Dip

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup shredded parmesan cheese
- 1 8 oz. package of cream cheese
- 1 jar of marinated artichoke hearts
- 1 french baguette, sliced into ½ inch rounds

Slice Jalapeños (this is the heat, so add accordingly to your preference). Mix together with mayonnaise, cheeses and artichoke hearts. Place in a pie dish. Bake at 375°F for approximately 25 minutes or until golden on top.

Serve warm with sliced baguettes.

### Bill’s Chicken Eggplant Panini

- 8 chicken breasts
- 8 slices Havarti cheese
- 2 fresh ripe sweet tomatoes
- ¼ cup chopped basil
- 3 cloves crushed garlic
- 1 eggplant
- 3 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 loaves french baguettes cut in quarters

Slice tomatoes and add crushed garlic and fresh basil leaves. Drizzle Extra Virgin Olive Oil and Balsamic Vinegar. Salt and pepper. Be generous with the oil and vinegar so you can dip your bread into it when assembling the sandwich. Set aside.

Slice eggplant into ¼ inch slices. Grill in a frying pan with a little Extra Virgin Olive Oil, salt and pepper. Set aside.

Grill chicken breast in frying pan. Assemble the sandwich.

Dip bread into oil and vinegar. Layer chicken, cheese, eggplant, and tomatoes. Press and grill in your Panini Press till bread is golden brown and cheese is melted.

me to share these ideas and recipes with the lovely readers of *Live Artfully*.

A few days later I received a touching thank you card from one of my friends that really summed up the entire experience. She said, "I just wanted to thank you for inviting me to your "Girls Night-in" party. It's amazing what an evening can do to lift one's spirit. I came to your house feeling empty and left feeling full and empowered! Kind deeds change lives."

My advice? Don't wait to entertain until your kids grow up. Our friends lift us up and keep us going. Life is meant to be shared and enjoyed.

Thank you, Bill, Shaunah, Jenny, Stacy, Julie, Cindy, Dawn, Traci and Camille! 🍴

### Mari's Chocolate Martini's

- 1 part Godiva original chocolate liquor,
- 1 part Godiva white chocolate liquor
- 1 part high quality vanilla vodka
- Ice

Pour equal parts of each ingredient in a large pitcher and keep refrigerated until ready to serve. Shake the mixture with ice in a martini shaker.

Drizzle some chocolate syrup in your martini glass and then pour in your drink.

### Edna Valley Grilled Vegetables

Camille Anderson

- 2 each red and yellow bell peppers cut lengthwise
- 1 red onion cut in 1/4 inch rounds
- 2 Italian squash, cut 1/4 inch slices
- 2 yellow squash, cut 1/4 inch slices
- 1 acorn squash, cut 1/4 inch slices
- 1 bunch asparagus
- 1 lb. cremini mushrooms
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. balsamic vinaigrette
- 1 Tbsp. fresh basil, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. fresh rosemary, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped

Heat outdoor grill or grill pan to medium-high heat. Brush vegetables with olive oil and grill until soft and charred all over. Whisk 1 Tbsp. olive oil, balsamic vinaigrette, garlic and herbs. Add salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle herb mixture over the vegetables. Serve warm or at room temperature.

### Raspberry Vinaigrette

Stacy Gegory

- 1 cup walnut pieces
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1-2 Tbsp. melted butter
- 1 shallot
- 1/3 cup walnut oil
- 4 Tbsp. raspberry vinegar
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2-4 Tbsp. sugar (to taste)
- Mix of Romaine, green and red leaf lettuce, approximately 2 cups each
- 1 cup red seedless grapes, halved

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix walnut pieces in a bowl with melted butter and brown sugar and stir until well coated. Spread in a single layer on a baking sheet and place in oven 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Let cool completely. I often make a large batch of the toasted walnuts and keep them in the freezer so they are ready to go anytime I make this salad.

Finely chop shallot. Place oil, vinegar, salt, shallot, and sugar in a small bowl and whisk together until well blended. I highly recommend tasting the dressing and adjusting it to your preference with either more sugar, more vinegar, etc. This recipe easily doubles or even triples to accommodate a large group or to make for future use. The salad dressing will keep for at least one week, if not longer, in the refrigerator.

Wash greens well and pat dry. Tear or chop lettuce and add dressing to taste. Top with grapes and walnuts and serve! Serves 6-8

### Party Pasta with Pesto

Stacy Gregory

- 3/4 lb. fusilli pasta
- 3/4 lb. bow tie pasta
- 1/4 cup good olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups pesto, packaged or homemade
- 1 10 oz. package frozen chopped spinach, defrosted and squeezed dry
- 1 1/4 cups real mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1 1/2 cups frozen peas defrosted
- 1/2 cup pignoli nuts (pine nuts)
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 3/4 tsp. ground pepper

Cook the pastas separately in a large pot of boiling salted water for 10-12 minutes (according to package directions) but don't overcook. Drain and toss into a large bowl with the olive oil. Cool to room temperature.

In a food processor fitted with the steel blade, puree the pesto and spinach. Add the mayonnaise and puree. Add the pesto mixture to the cooled pasta and then mix in the parmesan, peas, pine nuts, salt and pepper. Mix well, season to taste and serve at room temperature. I think this pasta salad tastes better if made the day before so that the flavors blend together. Serves 12

### Mocha Mousse Brownie Trifle

Dawn Ruda

Girls Night-in

This recipe inspired by Taste of Home Test Kitchen

- 5 cup prepared brownies, cubed
- 1 package (2.8 oz.) mocha mousse mix
- 1 carton (12 oz.) frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 1/4 cup English toffee bits or almond brickle chips
- Grated chocolate

Place half of the cubed brownies in a 2-quart serving bowl. Prepare mousse according to package directions. Spread half the mousse over the brownies. Top with half of the whipped topping. Sprinkle with toffee bits.

Repeat layers of brownies, mousse, whipped topping. Sprinkle with grated chocolate. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serves 10-12.

### Figalicious

Cindy Arnet

- 1/2 cup pine nuts, toasted
- 1 8 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 2 Tbsp. grated orange zest
- 1/4 tsp. fresh ground pepper
- 1/4 tsp. nutmeg
- 10 fresh figs, washed, stems removed
- 1/4 cup chocolate chips
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 Tbsp. Grand Marnier
- 1 orange, sliced for garnish

In a small bowl combine cream cheese, pine nuts, zest, nutmeg and pepper, mixing until smooth.

Slice figs in half lengthwise. Press about a tablespoon of the cream cheese mixture into the cut side of each fig.

Melt chocolate and butter in the microwave for one minute, then add the Grand Marnier and mix until creamy. Drizzle over the stuffed figs. Garnish on a platter with the orange slices. Serves 15-20.

### Crazy Mom on the Run Cheesecake

Traci

- 1 Oreo cookie, pre made pie crust
- 1 New Philadelphia Ready to Eat Cheesecake Filling (Chocolate Dream)
- 1/4 cup butter
- 3/4 cup semisweet chocolate chip morsels
- 4 Reese's peanut butter cups, chopped

Pour cheesecake filling into pie crust. Melt butter and semisweet chocolate chip morsels in a saucepan.

Pour the melted contents on top of the cheesecake filling. Sprinkle Reese's peanut butter cups on top.

Refrigerate for three hours.