

THE ST. REGIS ATLANTA

Bespoke

MAGAZINE

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the Midnight SUPPER

A ST. REGIS TRADITION CONTINUES

Design Haven

EXPLORING BUCKHEAD'S BENNETT STREET

Sweet Surprise

PASTRY CHEF MICHAEL CRAIG
JOINS THE ST. REGIS

A New Wine Country

GEORGIA WINERIES
GAIN ATTENTION





The midnight supper, held the night before Halloween, featured mysterious, sophisticated decor.

'IN THE GARDEN OF GOOD AND EVIL'

The St. Regis Atlanta hosts a hauntingly elegant midnight supper.

BY VICKI HOGUE-DAVIES | PHOTOS BY JAMIE REICHMAN

THE ST. REGIS MIDNIGHT SUPPER HARKENS BACK TO Caroline Astor, social doyenne of New York during the city's gilded age and the mother of John Jacob Astor IV, the hotel brand's founder. The tradition was born in 1898, when Caroline Astor welcomed hundreds of guests into her grand New York residence for supper and dancing following a Metropolitan Opera performance. Her carefully crafted list of invitees, which came to be called the "Astor 400," included the most wealthy, powerful and influential people of the time. Names like Vanderbilt, Rockefeller and Roosevelt graced the list. Through the years, Astor continued to host midnight suppers for her exclusive circle, with the events eventually moving to The St. Regis New York following its opening.

The St. Regis Atlanta continues this legacy, with a modern Southern sensibility. The resort's first midnight supper, themed "Midnight in the Garden of Good and

Evil" after the best-selling 1994 John Berendt book by that name, took place Oct. 30, the anniversary of Caroline Astor's death. The event, beginning at 8 p.m. and concluding at midnight, featured a reception and formal five-course dinner.

"We were very excited about the opportunity to do a midnight supper in the vein of Caroline Astor's gatherings in New York," says Mariam Karim, the resort's director of catering and conference services. "Since the date was so close to Halloween, we wanted to do an elegant event with a different kind of edge to it. Being at midnight and in the South and all that, we decided on the 'good and evil' theme."

"Mrs. Astor was very much an innovator within New York society with the events she did, everything from having ice skating in her ballroom as an evening event to having a midnight supper," she continues. "We honored her tradition in the sense that we did something that is





An elite hand-selected list of guests attended The St. Regis Atlanta's first midnight supper.

not what you would expect. Also, we invited only an exclusive list of people who we call 'The 400.' Like Mrs. Astor who started the social registry in New York, we identified a group of people who would mix well for our event."

The Atlanta 400

The elite list of hand-selected people who attended The St. Regis Atlanta's midnight supper were 25 wedding professionals from the Atlanta area.

"We compiled an exclusive circle of the most influential wedding professionals that we work with in the Atlanta area," says Julia McKelvey, The St. Regis Atlanta's catering account director. "We are calling them 'The 400' as inspired by Caroline Astor.

"We wanted to elevate the St. Regis experience for our partners who are influential in bringing us events and other opportunities," she continues. "Our purpose was to deepen our relationship with

them, which, in turn, would deepen their loyalty to us. Tradition and 'telling the story' is so important in the St. Regis experience, and we wanted them to feel like they are part of the story and that it is also their story to tell. Each year, we will evaluate inviting others to be a part of this discerning and exclusive group."

The resort invited the members to join this inner circle by presenting them with personalized black key cards. "Anytime a member of 'The 400' comes to the [resort], they present their card and receive complimentary VIP parking, dining and spa discounts and other incentives," McKelvey says. "The midnight supper is our first soiree in celebration of this phenomenal group of individuals."

Both McKelvey and Karim note that as event planning experts, "The 400" have experienced many different types of events, so for the midnight supper, bringing them something different and unexpected was vitally important.

"This is a group of very creative individuals who have all seen a great deal of events in all magnitudes," McKelvey says. "We wanted to do something that wasn't 'weddingque' or cookie cutter. We really wanted to create something with resonance that got them excited."

"So often, they plan gorgeous weddings with beautiful white flowers and it is all very romantic, typically in pastels and whites and those kinds of tones," Karim says. "We thought, 'Well, how do we do a dinner that has a different flavor and might not be what they are accustomed to seeing?'"

A Bespoke Invitation

Personalized invitations—written in calligraphy and illustrated with a photograph of the Bird Girl bronze statue that graced the cover of the "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil" book—went to each invitee for the supper held outside the Astor Ballroom. The intimate space



A jazz ensemble performs Ella Fitzgerald standards, setting a sultry mood at the dinner.

features floor-to-ceiling windows for spectacular nighttime views of the Backyard district's lights.

"The table was covered with interesting curiosities that trickled through the center of it," Karim says. "Antique candelabras, jeweled skulls, antique-like books, vintage brooches and jewelry, candles and really a mélange of little things to look at decorated the table. The room itself was completely draped in black silk tatters. It was all very romantic, but for lack of better words, sort of 'vintage-elegant.'"

A violinist in a long black gown entertained guests as they arrived for the pre-supper reception, wearing the requested cocktail attire, and enjoyed Champagne and drinks in the hallway outside the boardroom. A sipping of Heidsieck Monopole Champagne began the festivities, while the ambience channeled elegance mixed with a touch of edginess. When guests entered for dinner, approximately 45 minutes into the

evening, they were escorted by white-gloved St. Regis butlers, who handed them personalized menus as they sat down. A six-piece jazz band and female vocalist performing Ella Fitzgerald standards set a sultry mood.

Five-Course Dining

"We were very thoughtful in the placement of everyone," McKelvey says. "We wanted everyone to have fruitful conversations with each other. I think everything we do in our industry and especially within the world of weddings is all about having purpose and thinking outside the box and doing things that are exciting and different and pique everyone's interest and creative juices. We [know that] this event will be something that not only inspires these planners, but also deepens their relationships not only with St. Regis but with each other."

Place settings featured St. Regis silver and a

collection of antique ceramic charger plates in an off-white color that popped against the dark wooden table and black silk draping. Guests also found a bespoke surprise at each of their places.

"As a gift to our event planners, we customized a bejeweled apple that looked like it had been dipped in gold," Karim says. "Each apple was personalized with the name and company of the recipient. We chose an apple because it also reflects the garden theme."

The formal dinner began with a first course of foie gras terrine with garden huckleberries, smoked almond crisp and preserved lemon gastrique created by Executive Chef Joseph Trevino. A Heidsieck & Co. Monopole NV Champagne accompanied the dish.

"The savory foie gras was enhanced by the citrusy huckleberry and the sugar wafer with smoked almonds added a bit of crunchiness with the foie gras," he describes.



A Champagne asbering began the festivities.

There was synchronized meal service for each of the five courses, which were carefully created by Trevino. "The inspiration for the event menu for me was really two parts," he says. "Being in the South, I wanted to touch on Southern ingredients and incorporate the essence of the region. In terms of where the midnight supper came from and the inspiration from Caroline Astor, it was really also about what was in when she was putting on the dinners, which was classic French. Her dinners were extravagant affairs with caviar and Champagne that highlighted French ingredients and French technique, so that is sort of where the inspiration came from.

"We took Southern elegance and ingredients, but really wanted to make sure guests knew it came from that classic French inspiration," he continues. "I also wanted the menu to reflect the season, utilizing local produce to enhance each elegant protein."

At the first Caroline Astor midnight supper, the French menu included items such as "filet aux champignons farcis" (tenderloin stuffed with mushrooms), canvasback duck and pate de foie gras en croûte.

The Atlanta meal continued with a second course of warm lobster with cod cheek and chanterelle mushroom fricassée and a third course of "sons vide lapin" (rabbit), fava "soubise" (onion sauce), petite heirloom squash, port-macerated cipollini, prosciutto chip and carrot root. The exclusive wines served with them enhanced the dishes: a Marcel Servin Clablis Grand Cru 2010 for the second course and, for the third, a



Top left and right: elegant place settings; bottom: artful appetizers

Chorey-les-Beaune Burgundy 2008.

Trevino points out that all of the produce was local and many of the proteins were from the Southern part of the country. The rabbit in the third course came from an Alabama farm. Grass-fed beef from Tennessee was used in the main course, which was a doct of beef: a freshly seared wagyu striploin with horseradish cauliflower puree—in place of the more traditional mashed potatoes—and Swiss chard, and braised Kobe short rib tornado atop thinly sliced regional sweet potatoes. The fourth course was accompanied by

Chateau Rollan de By Medoc 2008.

Completing the first midnight supper was a butterscotch "budino" (pudding), which, Trevino points out, has its roots in Italy but didn't come of age until the New York dining scene. It incorporated rich caramel, cashew crumble, kiwi, strawberry and a salted caramel sugar cap for a bit of a play off a creme brulee.

What would Caroline Astor have said about this first midnight supper at The St. Regis Atlanta? Karm believes she would have responded by asking, "Where is my invitation?" ■



Personalized invitations written in calligraphy were mailed to each guest.

THE FIRST SUPPER

Caroline Astor's first midnight supper was detailed in an 1838 article in *The New York Times*, which made it clear that the supper and ball held following the Metropolitan Opera's opening night was the exclusive social event of the season.

The article notes that the high-society event "quite subordinated the importance of all other social events..." It describes details of the evening, including the decor, what the hostess served for dinner, the most important of the attendees and what the most graceful and elegant female guests were wearing. One woman, Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, was "strikingly gowned in light rose pink, with a diamond crown and a bunch of ostrich feathers fastened on her right shoulder." Another attendee, Mrs. Henry Sloane "wore apple green satin, with quite a low neck and a dazzling display of diamonds."

There were apparently so many diamonds and other precious jewels worn that police detectives in evening dress mingled among the partygoers to guard against highway robbers. More police detectives, described as a couple of "stalwart bluecoats," guarded the mansion's entrance.

The article also notes that the 200 coachmen waiting nearby, who had transported the approximately 400 guests in their carriages, received meal checks from the Church Temperance Society's coffee van, sending each of them to a sandwich and a cup of coffee.