



# Manuel!



Oh no, I've got to organise a dinner! How often has that exclamation been heard? Fear not: it's not as difficult as it's sometimes cracked up to be.

First question. Does your event need to be private? If it's a smaller party, especially of people who don't know each other very well, might it be safer to find a venue which can accommodate a group of your size in its main dining room (perhaps in a semi-private area or alcove)? Go to a 'public' venue, and the buzz of the main dining room should help you jump-start that 'party' atmosphere for your own event. Like a bonfire, the problem with a party is to get it started.

Once the party is in full swing, the organiser's main job is to ensure that the restaurant is keeping the event moving along at the pace you want: make sure you specify the time by which you'd like your guests to feel that they can make their way out into the cold night. (Perhaps with a little going home

present to remind them of the venue you chose? What about a foodie item relating to the establishment concerned?)

Remember that budgeting the food for a fixed menu is pretty easy. What's important is to make sure you've agreed how much pricey booze – and water, if you haven't stipulated CSR-friendly tap – you're expecting the staff to pour down your guests' throats. It's always a good idea to have recorded, in writing, the budget the establishment is working to. Also, make sure you know who's going to be in charge on the night, and meet up with them first – personally – to chat the event through.

For many events, the sheer size of the gathering, or a desire for privacy, is going to dictate a properly private venue. First job: find the right place. Consult one of the guides/online services, such as our own ([www.hardens.com/party](http://www.hardens.com/party)), and target a few venues that seem suitable. You'll learn so much from identifying three potential venues, visiting them, and quizzing the event staff on what they can do for you. Remember that, pre-Christmas, there will often be standard (and quite pricey) packages, but that, at other times, venues may be more able and

willing to think of something a bit special for your event.

A private room, of course, is a higher-risk/higher-reward proposition than a semi-public party. As for any event, you need to have met the manager in charge of your function, agreed all the costs, and have a timetable for the evening. But that's the boring bit. If it's truly a private party – even on a small scale – the organiser really is in charge, and you have the opportunity to make the event 'special'. Perhaps having a theme or entertainment might be appropriate? Might a seating plan which tries to mix people up a bit would be a good idea? The establishment should be able to help with place cards (and putting them out for you according to your plan), and they may also be able to print (or laser) a menu for you – usually at no extra cost, and it all contributes to a sense of occasion.

Ask the establishment at the earliest opportunity about the sort of things that people have done in the event space you're thinking of hiring: if they bubble with ideas which sound as if they might work – and how they can help you achieve them – this may indeed be the event venue for you.

**By Richard Harden**