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A Star In My Kitchen

By [Tara Weingarten](#) | NEWSWEEK

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When I moved into a swank mid-century Hollywood Hills pad last year, I wanted to throw a party befitting my excitement for my new dream home. That ruled out a wienies-and-beans shindig. Instead, I chose to blow my savings on a party catered by one of my favorite L.A. chefs: [Giacomino Drago](#), co-owner of 11 [Los Angeles](#) restaurants—including Beverly Hills' iconic Il Pastaio and the new Via Alloro. So on a warm December evening, the quintessentially Italian chef

took over my kitchen and wowed me and my 85 guests. Servers presented eight courses of small plates to my eager friends. Among them: fresh zucchini soufflé with warm white truffle sauce, delicate tuna tartar, flavorful porcini risotto and creamy vanilla panna cotta. Yes, it was expensive—about \$12,000 including party rentals and a full bar—but tasting the impeccably prepared food, hearing the laughter of my guests and seeing my gorgeous house glow with warmth from the fireplace and candlelight profoundly connected me to my new digs.

No matter how large or small the dinner party, catering by a celebrity chef will cost at least as much as a new compact car. Most certainly, fond memories of your fete will outlast your debt. Expect to pay about \$300 per person—food only—for a six- or seven-course sit-down dinner with a dozen people. Servers and kitchen staff will add about \$1,400. Cocktails, wine and flowers are extra, and then there's the 18 percent service charge. "The reason people hire a favorite restaurant chef is to combine what they love about a certain restaurant with the comfort they feel in their own home," explains Drago.

French pastry chef Francois Payard, who has shops in New York and Paris, will also cook for patrons at their homes. And über-chef [Wolfgang Puck](#) frequently cooks for regulars of his Spago Restaurants. It costs \$10,000 just to get him in the door to cook for around a dozen people. Add to that charges for the cooking and wait staffs, wine and extras, and that Puck dinner could quickly climb to \$20,000—enough to eat at Spago Beverly Hills every weekend for a year. If the host lives outside of Los Angeles, Puck's fee rises to \$25,000 plus the cost of first-class airfare.

Naturally, dinner guests are shocked to see Puck's famous visage peek out from the kitchen. "The best time was when a prominent wine collector in Chicago flew me to cook for his friends but didn't tell them it was me," says Puck. "The guests nibbled on hors d'oeuvres, commented on how great the appetizer was, and then the host brought me out to introduce the main course. The look on everyone's face was total shock. It was really fun." It must have been. But it wasn't priceless.

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