

ENTERTAINING WITH

## The Creator of ‘Salad for President’ Celebrates Her New Book

Julia Sherman looks back at a recent gathering at which she previewed recipes from ‘Arty Parties’ for friends — and shares tips on throwing a communal dinner of your own.

By Molly Creeden  
Oct. 20, 2021



Dinner guests enjoy cocktails at the Pasadena, Calif., home of the cookbook author Julia Sherman and her husband, Adam Katz. The bridge connects the deck to a hillside with an orchard and a Z-shaped path leading to Sherman’s A-frame office. Credit...Joyce Kim

Julia Sherman is famous for salad. In 2017, after her [blog](#) of the same name had grown a healthy following, she published the cookbook “[Salad for President](#).” Both presented salad recipes that Sherman, who received her undergraduate degree from the Rhode Island School of Design and has an M.F.A. from Columbia, often developed in collaboration with artists: wild-seeded greens and edible flowers with Madeleine Fitzpatrick, shredded brussels sprouts and shaved apple with Tauba Auerbach. Artists, it turned out, have a knack for combining ingredients to colorful and delicious effect, and salad making could be, if not always a central part of one’s practice — in 2014, Sherman asked the artist Alison Knowles to restage her 1962

performance piece “[Make a Salad](#)” on the roof of MoMA PS1 in Queens — then at least a way of bringing people together.

Sherman’s new book, “[Arty Parties: An Entertaining Cookbook](#),” out next week, takes that thinking a step further: Not only are artists better at making salad, it attests, they are better at entertaining, full stop. This has to do, Sherman believes, with their respect for process and their feel for drama and creative exchange. “Most artists I know don’t think of a meal as something they need to button up and present as finished work when people arrive, so there’s more of an opportunity to make, participate or think through something together,” Sherman says of the project, which took her to a tea party hosted by Susan Cianciolo and one of the weekly lunches that Tom Sachs throws for his studio assistants, where the star dish was a re-creation of Louis Armstrong’s take on red beans and rice.



Sherman, Katz and their daughter, Red, tie grape leaves around a branzino. Credit...Joyce Kim

A willingness to leave things unresolved was also on view one Sunday afternoon in August as guests trickled into Sherman’s Pasadena, Calif., home — a 1960s Boyd Georgi-designed structure with floor-to-ceiling windows in the living and dining rooms that Sherman and her husband, Adam Katz, the founder and C.E.O. of the creative agency Imprint Projects, recently spent a year restoring to its original glory — for a preview of recipes from the book and a long-awaited reunion with friends.

Sherman evinced none of the frenetic energy typical of someone who would soon need to feed 20 people, among them the writer and musician Claire L. Evans; the choreographer and architectural designer Jerome AB; the curator Mia Locks; and Ken Concepcion and Michelle Mungcal, the married owners of the Chinatown cookbook store [Now Serving](#). The hosts had also invited a number of the people who'd contributed to the home renovation, including Nina Weithorn, an urban gardener who helped with the front yard plot, which grows ginger, cucumbers, calendula, strawberries, rampicante squash, limequats and eggplant; her boyfriend, Liam Montano, a furniture maker who built the 10-foot Lakers purple-painted plywood kitchen table; and David Godshall, whose landscape architecture firm, [Terremoto](#), is responsible for the Z-shaped path that cuts through the brambly hillside behind the house.

After greeting the first arrivals, Sherman directed them down one floor to the spacious deck, which is attached to what she and Katz, having reconfigured the home's lower level as a guest suite with a wet bar and an entertaining kitchen, call the granny flat. (So far, its sleeping quarters have been tested by friends from the west side of Los Angeles and whichever parent is not watching the couple's 8-month-old son, Dove, on any given night, in addition to actual grandparents.) There, Katz was making spritz cocktails — a blend of [Jus Jus](#) (Sherman's brand of low-alcohol sparkling verjus), soda, vermouth, bitters, lemon and, in some cases, gin, and guests wandered in and out, sipping their drinks and munching on gem lettuce boats with grilled lemon and almond salsa.

Back in the main kitchen upstairs, Sherman carried on, roasting cauliflower; bundling herbs from the front garden, which would serve as party favors; pouring Acid League tomato saffron vinegar over a plum, husk cherry and tomato salad; and debating with her two-year-old daughter, Red, about whether she, too, could have a cocktail — in the end, they settled on cranberry juice and soda with lime. Dove was asleep in his Charlie Crane rocker in the living room, and remained so despite the hum of voices and the melodies of Donna Summer. Sherman, who isn't reticent about her dislike of formal seated dinners, designed the evening so that guests could continue to move about and meet new people — “one of the things I love doing at parties is introducing people I think will go on to become real friends,” she said — with the buffet-style porch table growing more crowded and colorful with each course. As always, the evening was also a chance for her to experiment with produce from the garden, which, stretching as it does from her front entrance walkway right up to the curb, frequently compels locals to wave at her through the kitchen window to come outside so they can ask her about it. After years of cooking, photographing and writing about food, Sherman still seems genuinely awe-struck and delighted by its possibilities.



The view from inside the granny flat on the home's lower level. Sherman and Katz renovated the space with a kitchen and wet bar for entertaining. Credit...Joyce Kim



A tomato, plum and husk cherry salad that was dressed with olive oil, salt and new Acid League saffron vinegar, a product developed by Sherman for the release of her forthcoming cookbook, "Arty Parties."



Grape leaves — picked from Sherman's garden — for wrapping the branzino before it was grilled.



Aster, lisianthus and yarrow flowers from Highland Park's Cookbook Market.

“This is my favorite summer thing right now,” she said, rearranging heaps of Persian basil, purple shiso and apple mint on a [Heath Ceramics](#) platter, alongside scarlet radishes and small bowls of walnuts, feta with dried rose petals and roasted beet and goat cheese dip — for sabzi khordan, a Persian side dish she learned about from a friend. Guests assembled the contents into wraps using sheets of Sangak flatbread that, before they were cut with scissors, were the length of a first grader. (“I thought they were table mats!” said Nu Goteh, the creative director of the design studio [Room for Magic](#)). Otherwise, but for a vase of purple aster and lisianthus flowers from Cookbook Market, a grocery in Highland Park, and a stack of plates from [Cerámica Suro](#) in Guadalajara, the table was essentially unadorned, the spread functioning as beautifully as any place setting or decorative centerpiece. “I feel like the food should be pretty enough to do the work for you,” said Sherman.

As the afternoon turned to early evening, she brought out a platter of raw branzino slathered with oil and stuffed with herbs, and enlisted everyone to help with the next course. She demonstrated how to wrap a fish in grape leaves, picked from her backyard, and twine. “Someone else will need to tie it,” she said. “Make new friends. It’s like that part in yoga class that everyone hates where you have to turn to the person next to you and be like, ‘Hi, I appreciate you.’” Nevertheless, Christina Ramos, a creative director, managed to tie her own

with taut, geometric lines that the rest of the table stopped to admire. “I’m good at wrapping presents, too,” she admitted. After Katz grilled everyone’s best efforts, Sarah Hymanson, the co-chef of the Los Feliz restaurant [Kismet](#), and Concepcion took turns unwrapping and filleting the fish, which were garnished with a smoky persillade sauce and enjoyed alongside spicy carrot ribbons with preserved lemon vinaigrette, sherry vinegar-marinated cauliflower and the tomato-and-stone-fruit salad.



One of the recipes from “Arty Parties,” cauliflower salad with curry vinaigrette.

Topics of conversation among the pockets of diners ranged from adoration for the Goop parody podcast [Poog](#) to attempts to spend less time online to the ritual of taking kids on the swan boats on Echo Park Lake. The group all reconvened for dessert — a Pavlova with chamomile and lemon verbena-poached white peaches, prepared and provided by Sherman, plus various ice creams and toppings she’d asked her guests to bring. “We designed this whole house around parties,” Sherman had told me earlier in the day. Between Covid-19 and the baby, there were moments when she and Katz wondered if they’d ever have any again, and hosting this dinner brought her back to one of her passions. “I felt like myself again,” she said after the last guests had said their goodbyes, and she and Katz had embarked on cleanup, a portion of the evening for which they did not mandate collaboration.



Sherman let these chamomile and lemon verbena-poached white peaches sit for four days before the party.



Spicy carrot ribbons with preserved lemon vinaigrette, another dish that features in Sherman's new cookbook

Here, Sherman shares tips for hosting a laid-back yet dynamic gathering of your own.

### Do the Messy, Boring Stuff Ahead of Time ...

"I'm finding that, now that I have kids, party planning happens in little bits," said Sherman, who prepped much of the meal in the days preceding the event, after her children went to sleep at night and before they woke up in the morning. On the Wednesday and Thursday before, she shopped at Super King and the South Pasadena Farmers' Market, and took into consideration what was in season in her garden to design the menu. She chose dishes whose preparation could be easily broken down into components, many of which, like the poached peaches that were served with the Pavlova, got better the longer they sat. On Thursday, she marinated the feta for the Mediterranean wraps in olive oil and herbs, and mandoline-sliced rainbow carrots for the salad. She submerged the bright ribbons in ice water and put them in the refrigerator, where they curled into sculptural shapes. The day before the party, she made the persillade sauce for the branzino — but held off on adding the lemon to it until just before it was served, so as not to discolor the herbs.



Everyone's fish-wrapping approach varied. Some guests attempted to swaddle their branzino; one fish was given a little grape leaf hat.

### ... But Save Some Hands-On Aspects to Do With Friends

Sherman thought that wrapping the fish — something that may seem difficult but is actually pretty doable — would be a fun and unusual activity. It's also, she notes, the easiest way to make branzino without overcooking it, as the leaves help keep the fish moist on the grill. And the approach saved Sherman time. "With that number of people, it happens superfast, compared to prepping a whole main course ahead of time and trying to get it out on the table," she said.

### Set Up Food and Drinks in Various Zones

"It's always good to separate the drinks and the food to avoid a cluster," noted Sherman, who stationed a bar cart with additional drink options on the deck, and served the sabzi khordan and main course on the large table, grapes and figs on a side table and more appetizers and drinks in the granny flat. Zones, she added, also give guests trapped in a conversation an out: "They can just say, 'I'm going to grab some food over here...'"



In the kitchen, flowers and serving platters from Heath Ceramics, Il Buco Vita and People's Pottery Project waiting for their assignments on a table designed by Liam Montano.



The cookbook store owner Ken Concepcion and the chef Sarah Hymanson garnishing their fish.

## Think of a Loose Theme

When it comes to the guest list, Sherman typically goes for a mix of people she's known forever and others she's met only once and wants to meet again. ("In L.A., this is a particular condition," she said.) She also suggests inviting people according to a loose theme likely to foster connection. "In this case I was thinking food, art and people who love plants," she said.



For dessert, Sherman asked guests to bring either ice cream or their favorite topping, which she served alongside a Pavlova and the poached peaches.



Katz pours Jus Jus, Sherman's low-A.B.V. (alcohol by volume) sparkling verjus, in a cocktail with soda, vermouth, bitters and lemon.

## Offer Booze Options at Both Ends of the Spectrum

"I like a very low-A.B.V. [alcohol by volume] daytime cocktail, and my husband likes to dive right in," said Sherman. Luckily, to the delight of Katz and some of the guests, Jus Jus can easily be dialed up with gin.

## Ask Guests to Bring Some Trimmings

"People are always stumped on what to bring the host, so I like to assign everyone small and personal items to bring," said Sherman. For this dinner, she asked attendees to contribute either their favorite ice cream or their favorite sundae topping. The result was a joyful spread of varied tastes: pints of Big Softee, Magpies Softserve and Thrifty Ice Cream; a spiced nut mix made by Hayley Magnus, an actress and one of the guests; edible flowers from Weithorn; and Sherman's poached peaches. Red, just tall enough to peer over the table, kept a close watch on all.



One guest's ice cream selection, with edible flowers brought by the urban gardener Nina Weithorn, and spiced nuts from the actress Hayley Magnus.