

# LIFE of THE

# PARTY

Words TESS DE VIVIE DE RÉGIE

*From the GLITTERING BALLS of on-screen PERIOD DRAMAS à la Bridgerton to MEGA celebrity WEDDINGS, our appetite for LAVISH CELEBRATIONS remains as STRONG AS EVER. And for the FORTUNATE FEW for whom MONEY is NO OBJECT, a no-expenses-spared party is AN OPPORTUNITY to bring pure FANTASY to FRUITION*



Oprah Winfrey and Mariah Carey at Oprah's Legends Ball in 2005.

Photography: George Burns.

**M**ost of us mere mortals need to keep an eye on the budget when planning a party. Frugality, however, was not the order of the day at the recent Ambani-Merchant wedding. The off-the-scale nuptials that took place in Mumbai this past July between scions of two of India's wealthiest families (the groom's father, Mukesh Ambani, chair and managing director of Reliance Industries, is the richest man in Asia) made headlines globally. The wedding celebrations attracted a constellation of stars, including Nicky Hilton Rothschild, Tony Blair and two Kardashians and featured a fleet of private planes for guest transportation and a wedding party sporting priceless jewels. The manifold pre-wedding festivities, which stretched over five months, included performances by Rihanna, Justin Bieber and Katy Perry. *The Guardian* placed the wedding's cost at around the \$900 million mark; it was, without question, a celebration engineered to command significant attention.

The event was not without controversy. While the wedding was taking place, entire Mumbai neighbourhoods experienced flooding attributed to inadequate drainage infrastructure after monsoon rains, illustrating the stark disparity between India's richest and poorest. City residents railed against major road closures aimed at accommodating the arrival of high-profile guests, while back in June, *The Independent* reported locals' displeasure that access to the bay of Portofino in Italy was restricted for an Ambani-Merchant pre-wedding cruise.

Panamanian-born, New York-based event designer Preston Bailey crafted some 60 larger-than-life sculptures of animals for the affair. While an NDA precluded him discussing his involvement in this year's festivities, they represented his third time collaborating with the Ambani family, having also helped design the weddings of the groom's two siblings: sister Isha in 2018 and brother Akash in 2019.

"[For Isha's wedding], we made large installations from thousands of flowers," he shares. "My approach to creating something unique is to take one element and repeat it thousands of times. At a royal wedding in Qatar, we made an installation of over three million crystals to create a raining effect." At the same event, Bailey devised a "dessert shop", a whole room dedicated to sweet treats for guests to enjoy.

A blowout bash has always been an opportunity for the moneyed to peacock their wealth, taste and connections before their peers and society at large. Take Truman Capote's 1966 Black and White Ball: held at the glitzy Plaza Hotel in New York City, it famously assembled the who's who of high society with its 540-strong guest list, which counted Lee Radziwill, Gloria Steinem, Frank Sinatra and Mia Farrow. Such is the ball's enduring cultural clout, it featured in not one, but two, hit streamer series in 2024: Ryan Murphy's *Feud: Capote vs. The Swans* on the FX network (which dedicated an entire episode to the event) and then Season 4 of Darren Star's *Emily in Paris* on Netflix. For the striking black-and-white ensemble that the titular Emily sported in that ball scene, British designer Harris Reed turned to a striped dress that Amanda Burden, daughter of socialite and Capote 'Swan' Babe Paley, wore on the night for inspiration. At the recent *Emily in Paris* Season 4, Part 2 premiere in Rome, costume designer Marylin Fitoussi told *BAZAAR*: "I was thinking and dreaming about [it] since season one and finally [the writers] listened to me and they did a ball," referencing the "very French tradition" of the *bal masqué* that dates from the 18th century. "I wanted to mix American culture and French culture."

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Among the tastemakers dreaming up the most fabulous affairs of today, there's Zambia-born, US-based event planner Colin Cowie. He organised Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck's 2022 wedding, Oprah Winfrey's 50th birthday gala in 2004 and Winfrey's Legends Ball in 2005. That celebration was in honour of 25 trailblazing African American 'legends', including Maya Angelou, Tina Turner and Coretta Scott King as well as 'young'uns' following in their footsteps, such as Angela Bassett and Halle Berry. "Each legend received a pair of diamond chandelier earrings and the young'uns received diamond hoop earrings," shares Cowie.

Originally hailing from Melbourne and now splitting her time between Europe, the US and the Bahamas, Zoë de Givenchy, founder of artisanal home- and tableware line Z.d.G. (and member of the namesake fashion dynasty via her marriage to designer Hubert de Givenchy's nephew Olivier) works with some of the world's best event organisers.

In Paris, de Givenchy relies on Isabelle Moltzer, a chef and interior designer whose clients include Piaget and Maria de la Orden. In June, de Givenchy co-hosted an intimate dinner party on behalf of luxury furniture platform The Invisible Collection at the atelier of Parisian woodworking firm Féau



Guests arriving at Truman Capote's Black and White Ball in New York, 1966.

Boiseries. "Isabelle catered and created a beautiful table using [the Z.d.G.] Les Bleuets collection on a denim tablecloth with tulipières filled with wildflowers," recalls de Givenchy. "It made for a truly memorable summer evening."

Françoise Dumas holds the prize title of, as de Givenchy puts it, "the undisputed queen of events in Paris, lovingly referred to as the 'Mistress of Ceremonies'". A great friend of the late Karl Lagerfeld, Dumas helped organise the wedding of Prince Albert and Princess Charlene of Monaco and, alongside her associate Anne Roustang, has for the last three decades crafted the look of The Rose Ball, a yearly charity gala thrown by the Monégasque royal family to celebrate the beginning of the social season. Dumas was responsible for the dinner in honour of the June 2022 Christie's auction of Hubert de Givenchy's extensive private collection, which ranged from 18th-century furniture to works by Picasso and Giacometti and ultimately raised €118.1 million (AU\$192.5 million). Held at Pavillon Ledoyen, a triple Michelin-starred restaurant a stone's throw from the Champs-Élysées, British aristocrats Sarah, Duchess of York, the Earl of Snowdon and India Hicks were also in attendance. "She seemed to transport us back in time directly to Hubert's table," remembers de Givenchy of Dumas' décor, which featured silverware from Hubert de Givenchy's own collection.

In Italy, de Givenchy recommends Diana Sorensen of Sugokui Events, whom Bumble founder Whitney Wolfe Herd also tapped for her 2017 wedding in Positano. "We worked with [Sorensen] for my stepdaughter, Gabriella's, wedding in Capri and her creativity, elegance and on-the-ground knowledge were masterful," says de Givenchy of the 2021 affair, where the bride wore haute couture Givenchy and guests dined by candlelight overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Sydney-born Malcolm Carfrae headed up global communications at Calvin Klein and later Ralph Lauren before founding his own company, Carfrae Consulting, in New York in 2016. In August, he masterminded a dinner for Italian cashmere house Brunello Cucinelli, set among the blooming hydrangeas and vines of Wölffer Estate's Hamptons winery. A five-course Italian meal, served on a long communal table decorated with flowers, was enjoyed by Emma Roberts, Tamu McPherson and Rachel Zoe, among others. "For me, a successful summer dinner is about nailing three things: great



Isabelle Moltzer tablescape for an event at Féau Boiseries, Paris, featuring Zoë de Givenchy tableware, June 2024.



A May 2024 wedding styled by Mindy Weiss.



Kim Kardashian and Khloé Kardashian arriving at the Ambani-Merchant wedding in Mumbai, 2004.



Melissa George and Kym Wilson at the Cointreau Ball, 1997.



Peter Morrissey and Leona Edmiston at the Cointreau Ball, 1993.

**"IT'S CHEMICAL. IT'S ABOUT THE VIBRATION BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS. PARTIES ARE MADE TO MAKE US HERE, IN THE PRESENT MOMENT..."**



Gabriella de Givenchy's wedding in Capri, 2021.

hosts that everyone wants to see, a location everyone wants to go to (a chic private home or the first look at a hot new restaurant, for example) and a thoughtful curation of people who are fun, interesting and a bit unexpected," offers Carfrae.

To celebrate Zimmermann's first Caribbean store opening, Carfrae arranged a two-day beachside affair in St. Barts in June, where Sugokui Events dreamed up a joyously colourful tablescape decorated with artisanal crockery, bougainvillea and native seagrapes. "St. Barts is an idyllic location and had been on the cards for a while," shares Nicky Zimmermann. "We had so much fun celebrating this opening with friends of the house [including Isla Fisher, Jourdan Dunn and Bambi Northwood-Blyth] from all over the world."

Mindy Weiss is the woman behind Justin and Hailey Bieber's 2019 nuptials, as well as Paris Hilton's 2021 wedding to Carter Reum and has organised numerous baby showers, birthday parties and Christmas Eve soirées for the Kardashian-Jenner clan over the years. "If you set the stage for memories with the right people in an inviting and comfortable atmosphere, any party can be legendary," she reflects.

Model, singer and former First Lady of France Carla Bruni-Sarkozy certainly knows a good celebration when she sees one. (In the latest season of *Emily in Paris*, Sylvie Grateau's mother, Héloïse, quipped of her legendary nightclub of yore, "Carla Bruni almost drowned here at a foam party in the '80s") "I've been to so many parties - [enough] for 20 lifetimes!" jokes Bruni-Sarkozy of her modelling years. "[They] were amazing."

As for what makes a great party? "It's chemical," she muses. "It's about the vibration between human beings. Parties are made to make us be here, in the present moment, just chatting with others or dancing or even flirting. And that is healing." HB

Photography: Getty Images (Black and White Ball, Kim Kardashian and Khloé Kardashian; Aaron Delasie (Mindy Weiss); Zoe de Givenchy (Gabriella de Givenchy wedding); Cointreau Ball); courtesy