

Travel Feature

The World's Hottest Parties

By Sophia Banay

Dinner tickets to this year's Costume Institute Gala at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art started at \$5,000 each. When those sold out, a waiting list formed. For the invitation-only after-dinner dance, tickets were \$400 a piece.

And if you think snagging an invitation, selecting the right designer dress and shelling out the cash to attend sounds difficult, try organizing the entire night, start to finish.

Major benefit galas and just-for-fun bashes take place around the world every year--that's nothing new. But these high-profile events have given rise to a new breed of party/event planners who, besides being able to get high-profile people to the soirees, have become mini-celebrities themselves.

"Event-planning is the 'it' job," says **David Adler**, chief executive officer and founder of **BiZBash Media** and **BiZBash.com**, which produce New York City-based trade publications for the event-planning industry. "They're talking about it on *The Sopranos*. I think there's like 12 television shows now about event planning. A few years ago, chefs were in the back kitchen, and now they're coming out front. It's the same with event planning. You're seeing a new respect for it."

Adler credits **David Monn**, an interior designer-cum-event planner, with breathing new life into the Met's Costume Institute Gala over the past two years. To fit with this year's theme, "AngloMania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion," Monn turned the museum's Great Hall into pastoral England, filled with live trees and moss. The 30-foot-high columns in the Englehard Court were smothered in blossoming wisteria vines, and the floor was covered with a grass carpet.

Monn's office won't release financial data, so we don't know how much the Met paid for his services. But even if he donated his time, a highly visible event like this--it raised \$4.5 million--garners him huge amounts of publicity, resulting in press that pays dividends down the road.

Interior design is only one part of a successful party. There's another ingredient: "celebrities, celebrities, celebrities," says **Andrea Sims**, the founder of **Lion's Share Communications**, a Washington, D.C.-based event and public relations firm. "If you don't have a celeb, you don't have a party. Whether it's a gala, a benefit or a gold tournament, celebrities are key to success--meaning dollars earned."

Sims raised a combined \$3.8 million in corporate sponsorships and fund-raising for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, held in Washington, D.C., in 2005. In 2002, she raised over half a million dollars with a live-auction benefit for Mercy Ships, a charity that sends doctors to Third World countries. One guest bid \$80,000 for two weeks in another guest's 20-room, fully staffed castle in Scotland.

Sims' Web site features pictures of her with **Ben Affleck**, **Oprah Winfrey** and **Sharon Stone**. "I've got a great Rolodex, and that's why celebrities will come and attach their names to these things," she says. But while Sims is busy raising mega-bucks for charities, she's also making some fairly major money for herself. She won't reveal her exact salary, but says that through a standard combination of retainer fees plus a percentage of the money raised, she makes in the six figures doing five events a year.

To earn those kinds of salaries, event planners must stay on top of evolving party trends. This season, "audiovisual is everywhere," says Adler. "The use of technology and lighting in planning a party is the biggest thing." So as planners everywhere compete to outdo one another,

partygoers can expect some pretty impressive displays on their social rounds this year.

At the Serpentine Gallery in London, the annual summer fund-raiser for the Serpentine Trust incorporates some of the newest design technology around. The party is held in the museum's pavilion, which is re-conceptualized and constructed from scratch each May, then dismantled and sold the following October. "The pavilion is our architectural programming strand of the gallery," says **Tom Coupe**, a press officer at the Serpentine who helps plan the party each year.

This year, the gallery selected

Pritzker Prize-winner **Rem Koolhaas**, founder of the Rotterdam, Netherlands-based **Office for Metropolitan Architecture**, and **Cecil Balmond**, deputy chairman of global design firm **Arup**, to design the pavilion. The structure will be a roofless, circular auditorium. An enormous helium balloon perched on top will rise in good weather and descend to form a roof during rain.

But sophisticated technology doesn't have to be expensive, and the Serpentine has found a way to raise money from a project that would otherwise be prohibitively costly. "Most of the work done on it is donations in kind by the engineers, architects and fabricators," Coupe

explains. "The final sale price covers the rest of its cost, so in effect it's free." Last year's pavilion, a timber-grid structure made from 700 machine-cut pieces, sold for £300,000 (about \$560,000). Now that's a party favor.

So you can plan your globe-trotting social life this year, Forbes.com has again compiled its annual list of the World's Hottest Parties. We included a wide array of events, from debutante balls to benefits. As grand as they can be, we did not include sporting events, like the Henley Regatta, or multiday festivals such as Carnival in Rio de Janeiro. Instead, we focused on exclusive soirees around the world. Party on.



Lion's Share Communications, Inc.

Andrea Sims, President & Founder
1350 Beverly Road
Suite 115-157
McLean, VA 22101

DC Metro: (703) 670-5299
Toll Free: (866) LSPROD1 (577-7631)

andrea@lionsshareinc.com