

# AMP UP YOUR social LIFE

Snoozy soirées are so 2011. These **three parties** deliver maximum fun for the guests, minimal stress to the hostess, and an excellent excuse to reconnect

## WHY PUNCH?

"Bringing guests together around a large-batch drink tends to help them connect," says mixologist Alex Ott. "It's the whole watercooler-chat idea, but with alcohol!"

Anthropologie beverage dispenser, \$298; anthropologie.com. Kikkerland retro paper straws, \$6/144; sitenyc.com. Jonathan Adler playing cards, \$78; jonathanadler.com. Danielle Chips in pumpkin and okra, \$3/bag; amazon.com.

GREG BROOM

## Everyone is bringing a bottle anyway—why not make it the main event? Host an... unfussy WINE TASTING

**THE BEV** Affordable wine can still be tasty, especially if you know what to look for. Susan Kostrzewa, an editor at Wine Enthusiast, recommends Beaujolais, a light-bodied red that's rarely more than \$15 a bottle. Serve in short juice glasses, which are less likely to spill than those with long stems.

## WINE GIZMOS

An in-the-bottle wine aerator (\$25; winesoire.com) eliminates the need for decanting. The freezer-chilled Corkcicle (\$23; corkcicle.com) keeps whites cool.

**THE NOSH** Nix the cheese platter and stock the cookie jar: Botanical Bakery shortbread are made to pair with wine. Spicy Ginger Squared (left) is ideal with reds; zesty Lemon Thyme works with whites (\$7 each; botanicalbakery.com).

**THE FUN** Vinodote (\$12; thespitbucket.com), a Mad Libs-style game, breathes LOL fun into a typically stodgy tasting.

## MAKE IT COZY

Light a campfire-scented candle, push the furniture aside, and sit on fuzzy blankets. Below: Le Labo Petit Grain candle, \$60; 888-894-8811. Pendleton blankets, \$108 each; pendleton-usa.com. GSI enamelware mug, \$4, and coffee pot, \$23; gsioutdoors.com.



Don't let cabin fever get you down! Gather your group and kick back for an...

## indoor CAMPOUT

**THE BEV** Spike hot chocolate with rum or butterscotch schnapps, or warm a bottle of merlot in a skillet with whole cloves, cinnamon sticks, and cardamom pods. Serve both in outdoorsy enamelware. "Hot drinks also fill the house with a delicious, welcoming aroma," says Ott.

**THE NOSH** Assemble a grown-up s'mores bar stocked with graham crackers; gingersnaps; lemon wafers; white, dark, and milk chocolate; and marshmallows. No fireplace? Use your oven's broiler, or sub in already gooey spreads like Nutella and Marshmallow Fluff. You'll be surprised how fast people gobble these up.

**THE FUN** "I love the Ouija board," says Oren. "It freaks me out every time." Download the Ouija Board app (\$2; on iTunes) to put a techy twist on it. Another update on old-fashioned thrills: huddling around the crackling fireplace iPhone app (\$1; on iTunes) and telling scary stories!

## A little friendly competition is always a winner. Throw a... stylish GAME NIGHT

### THE BEV Bourbon Punch

- 12 chamomile tea bags
  - 1 package (6 oz.) fresh raspberries
  - 1 bottle (750 ml) bourbon (like Blanton's)
  - 2 liters cranberry juice
  - 12 tbsp sugar
  - ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- Steep tea bags in 3 cups hot water. Mash berries. Combine all ingredients and serve over ice in a collins glass.

**THE NOSH** Heavy plates of food can be a buzzkill when guests are trying to get their game on. Caterer Peter Callahan suggests checking out the frozen food section of your local

gourmet grocery before cracking a cookbook. Fun options: bite-sized pizzas, empanadas, or sliders. Minimize greasy fingertips with a healthy option: Danielle Veggie Chips (opposite) have a satisfying crunch and come in unexpected varieties like okra and pumpkin.

**THE FUN** Five-card draw, hearts, and gin rummy are always crowd-pleasers—and easy to teach newbies (go to bicyclecards.com for directions). Reese Witherspoon's event planner, Yifat Oren, gives practical prizes, like Starbucks gift cards, to winners. "People love them," she says.

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