

Too much over-rich food, booze, politics, religion and sex—that's my kind of party. Sitting between other men's wives, judging the claret with pompous inexperience and reluctantly having "just one more helping" of the duckling while arguing about free love, free church and free trade—can you think of anything better?

At the parties I enjoy most there are one or two people that I know and like, half-a-dozen that I have never seen before and at least one that someone there loathes. The plates must be hot and the tablecloth pretty, but not so pretty that wine spilt on it is a major catastrophe. There should be an open fire on any but the hottest nights because it is something to hurl empty cigarette packets into and for someone to say there is nothing like.

Aperitifs should be limited or guests making their choice will impair the service. Tio Pepe, gin and dry vermouth are enough (although there are people who like whisky or beer, I am told). The bottles should be near the guests and there must be plenty of ice. I don't mean eight Oxo-sized cubes that come out of the freezing tray and there-will-be-more-soon-if-you-can-hang-on-for-ten-minutes. I mean plenty. Enough to crunch bottles into or drop into tumblers in mad abandon.*

Host and hostess should be in the kitchen; no one wants them fussing around about ash on the sofa covers. Dinner should always be a little late because this has everyone hungry and in the right mood to appreciate the cooking. Let's start with lots of small dishes, however simple: avocado, shrimps served plain, roll-mops, anchovy or just hard-boiled egg served with home-made mayonnaise.

Somewhere about here there should be a soup that has earned its name: tomato soup made from tomato, or chicken soup made from chicken. As for a jellied consommé based on a good beef stock—the cook will still be wallowing in the compliments when all else is forgot.

A fish course? It makes a meal into a banquet. Steam some fillets or poach something really big and set light to it on a bed of fennel twigs. Make a salmon mousse or avoid any work at all by serving buckling with thin brown bread-and-butter.

If there are lots of guests, I prefer not to wait while the host carves a big joint; by the time he has been to get the Elastoplast it is cold. After the meat course the simplest of salads must appear before the ladies whip out their fags. Shredded white cabbage with yoghurt as a dressing is simple. Serve it on the dinner plates; it will save the washing-up.

Ah, the cheese. For me some Bresse Bleu and a piece of Capricet des Dieux. O.K., then perhaps just a sliver of Wensleydale. A different sort of bread would be good with the cheese. How about a really dark one?

Why are the host and hostess sitting there eating cheese? They should be in the kitchen warming the Chinese ginger sauce for the home-made ice-cream or standing by the soufflé with a stop watch. Don't be too long with the coffee. What about continental roast for a change? With the dessert? Yes, as soon as it's ready, thank you.

What was that awful man saying about . . . well, since it's Remy Martin and since I'm not driving. The women all look much prettier now—it must be the time of day or the thin gauze of tobacco smoke behind which they are sitting. I'm glad someone is taking that terrible man down a peg. You made them yourself? Oh I *do*—Petits Fours *and* a fresh peach—dare I take one of each? Well, I'm fourteen stone now. Oh, I'm sure I do, but I'll have another, anyway.

No, I've got brandy, thank you. To compare? What a splendid idea. And a cigar? Well since it's such a pleasant evening. The pretty girl on my left just adores the aroma.

Mints, a nice touch. If there is some more, just black for me—no sugar. I'm on a diet.

Thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it; too bad you two were in the kitchen all the time. You must visit us some time. Of course it won't be like this—we serve the simplest possible food: we like to spend as much time as possible with our guests.

* Ice Cubes Ltd (PARK 3182) deliver 20 lb. for 10s. in London. Otherwise contact your local ice company.



My Kind of Party

BY LEN DEIGHTON

Len Deighton is author, artist, self-taught cook. At thirty-four he has almost given up his first love, drawing, to concentrate on writing following the success of his first novel, *Ipcress File*, a spy-thriller, now in its third impression, and being filmed by the *Dr No* team in the autumn. Now he's writing the next in the series, *Horse under Water*, which Jonathan Cape will publish; also a cook-book, partly based on his cook-strip in the *Observer*. This strip is the one regular drawing job he'll continue to do. He is married to artist Shirley Thompson

