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So the proposal is over and you are basking in each other's love, but wait there's more! It's time to party and share the exciting moment with friends and family!

THE ENGAGEMENT PARTY

This is the time when as couple you are congratulated by friends and family for getting engaged. So dust off your partner's knee and get ready to party the night away!

With engagement parties today, there are no rules. Whether you are lucky enough to have your parents pay for your celebration or if you and your fiancé decide to pay for it yourselves, the engagement party can be an intimate or grand occasion depending on your personal style. With many restaurants, bars, function venues and scout halls available for today's couples the world is your oyster. But if you are thinking of a more intimate occasion, you may like to invite your loved ones over for a formal candle-lit dinner or a backyard BBQ with a game of cricket. Just remember it is YOUR engagement party and you can have fun however you want to!

Once you have decided the direction your celebration will take, it's time to start spreading the word. For a more formal occasion, invitations are a must. They set the scene for the evening and your guests will know what to expect. You don't want Uncle Greg turning up in Stubbies and thongs to a cocktail party do you? I shouldn't think so! In the technological era we live in, I know you can all text with your eyes closed. However for a casual occasion it would be much more civilised to pick up the phone and call your guests. If you are worried you will be on the phone until the wee hours of the morning, then an invitation or more personalised email may be the way to go.

Now for the most important part of the evening... food! Food may be the

way to a man's heart but it also keeps women from getting cranky. No matter if it is a luncheon, BBQ, cocktail party or a sit down dinner it is important that you have enough food to feed your guests. For those with friends who are vegetarians, vegans or have allergies, it is important to take them into consideration when planning your menu. Most venues today will cater to guests' specific needs but double check before booking.

BUCK AND HEN'S NIGHT

Just admit it, you skipped past the engagement party straight to this section. Fair enough - it is what most men look forward to and let's face it, what women can't wait to be a part of. It is your last night of singledom! So let's talk about your big night ahead!

First, the buck's night also known as the night of pure pleasure...pure pleasure of hanging with your mates I mean! That's right boys, the days have passed when strippers were a must. Today's men like to live it up without the expense of watching a stripper twirl around the pole while drinking \$10 beers. Now don't fear, I am not suggesting your night be 'G' rated, all I am saying is to think outside the box. Do a brainstorm of what the groom-to-be would actually enjoy doing. This could range from club-hopping to a boys' weekend away on the slopes with your snowboards. Not to rain on your parade but there are some general rules that apply to a buck's night out. Firstly it is the Best Man that hosts and organises the evening and is responsible for getting the groom home at the end of the night...preferably in one piece. You don't want to be the one calling the >

PRE-WEDDING

parties!



Photography **Modern Wedding Girls at the Artful Hen** www.theartfulhen.com.au.

bride up at four in the morning trying to explain why her fiancé is handcuffed naked to a lamppost. And finally do not organise the bucks night for the night before the wedding, it will never end on a happy note.

Ok ladies, time to put on your Jimmy Choos and your party dress as you plan to dance the night away...just don't expect them to be in one piece at the end! Typically the Chief Bridesmaid organises the hen's night, which is usually full of fun and games. There are many roads you can take with a hen's night, from high tea to a cocktail bar to attending a drawing class of a nude model. Whichever direction you take, make sure there is alcohol and scrumptious nibbles. Though the night is all fun and games, please ensure that the bride-to-be enjoys herself and will be comfortable in the evening that is planned ahead.

For those who want to think outside the box, why not combine the buck and hen's night for one big party. However if you are looking forward to some time apart, you could combine an aspect of your night, for example start off with dinner together and then separate into your groups for the evening.

ENTERTAINING THE MIND

Add a little sophistication to your hen's night with the Artful Hen who offers a unique night out with a life drawing experience and gorgeous naked models all in the name of art! The artful hen

is a hilarious night of art, champagne, music and games and sure to leave a lasting impression. Established in the year 2000, it remains to be the original and still the best. For a truly creative celebration, Artful Hen can be contacted on 0412 179 357, email info@theartfulhen.com.au or visit their website www.theartfulhen.com.au

DECORATION AND THEMING YOUR VENUE

To set the scene for a party there is no better way then creating a theme! A theme helps create atmosphere for your guests and is as simple as picking your favourite colours or even your favourite place.

When it comes to decorating and theming your party there are two ways to go. You can DIY or you can employ the help of a professional decorator. Decorating your own engagement party can be a fun way to express your creativity.

Work with the venue – Sounds simple enough but remember to stick with the less is more theory - a simple decoration can look simply amazing.

Fabric – It is all in the fabric darling! Find a beautiful piece of fabric that reflects your theme and create wonders with chair covers, ceiling drapings and table runners. The best bit is that there are so many to choose from!

Fantastically floral – Flowers can beautify a venue. A simple table centrepiece can jazz up your party.

Or why not go all out with floral chair decorations and rose petals scattered around the room. Either way your party will smell delicious!

For those who would prefer to employ the help of a professional decorator follow these guidelines to help you make this important decision. **Keep your options open** – Like any major decision you make in life, it is best to have a couple of options. Do your research and ask around your friends for recommendations to make a shortlist of two to three decorators.

Meet and greet – Meet with your shortlist of decorators and discuss what your visions of your party are and your budget. In your discussions make a note whether they listen to your ideas and help bring your theme to life. After all the most important part of choosing a decorator is if you are comfortable with them.

All in a days work – Ask to see their portfolio of work from previous events and parties. If you like their work you might want to ask to see testimonies from previous clients.

Get it in writing – Once you have made your mind up, make sure you get your agreement in writing. This will ensure there are no misconceptions on what you are both getting.

GIFT REGISTRIES

At your engagement party it's more than likely you will receive gifts from your friends and family. It will be up to

you to decide if you want to go down the road of a gift registry or allow your guests to buy items of your choice. The pros of a gift registry is that not only will you get gifts that you need and want, it ensures that there will be no double ups (there are only so many Jamie Oliver endorsed products you can have). Your guests will also appreciate knowing that they bought you something you actually wanted.

For those of you who have been living together for a long time and have accumulated the household items you need (lucky things!) it is time to think outside the box. What about creating a gift registry with your favourite art gallery? There's nothing like an amazing piece of artwork to liven up your house or to keep as an investment. Or for those forward thinkers out there why not register your honeymoon? It is never too early to start planning and you will have payed it off by the time the big day arrives.

SPEECHES

It is that time of the night, you're having a ball and you settle down ready to sample that cake when you think... oh my god a speech! Never fear Modern Wedding is here! Lucky for you it's your engagement party and anything goes when it comes to speeches.

For those who don't have the confidence to pull off an impromptu speech, it would be a good idea to write down some key points. The most important points to remember are to thank your guests for coming and to thank the person who organised the event.

The father of the groom and also the father of the bride may like to make a toast to the couple on the evening. If your parents are shy, do not force the issue. You may like to ask a close friend or family member to make a toast instead. And if you are delivering a speech on the night, it would be best to slow down on the alcohol till after you make it. ■

Helpful tips to making a good speech:

- Keep it short and sweet
- Speak from the heart – sounds corny but it will win over your guests
- Keep your speech clean and tasteful – avoids awkward moments
- Don't rush your speech, slow down.
- A joke is always fun, but if you are not confident you will get laughs – drop the joke straight away.

Note: For those who are having more guests at their engagement party than their wedding, do not make the fatal mistake of saying in your speech "See you all at the wedding!" You will be surprised how many people will remember you saying this later on down the track.



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