



CAROLE MIDDLETON PLANS THE PERFECT

get-together

We all want our festive do to be a great success. Carole Middleton, of the UK's leading party company, Party Pieces, gives her advice

Carole Middleton founded Party Pieces in 1987 after finding it difficult to source fun, simple party products for her children's parties. The company is the original UK mail-order party company – starting from a shed in the back garden. Now, more than 25 years on, the company is going from strength to strength, and with Carole actively involved, it's still very much a family business.



INVITATION
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What ideas do you have for making a great first impression on guests? Be bold and don't shy away from large-scale decorations. It's all too easy to play it safe, but for me, the bigger, the better! Showcase large hanging accessories in your hallway to give your home an impressive entrance. My particular favourites are our 3D hanging stars, large silver snowflake pinwheels and pom-poms, which are all inexpensive yet full of impact. There is nothing nicer than seeing your home all dressed up!

What's most important about Christmas decorations? When buying in new ranges for Party Pieces, I love discovering what the different trends will be for the coming year. The days of just traditional colours are a thing of the past. This year I really like styles where red, aqua, green and gold are teamed together – so fresh and contemporary. Our concertina lanterns are just beautiful and very popular this season.

What makes a memorable party? Give your event a theme. You could go for something warming like an “Alpine” party – think fake snow, Kilner jars of gluhwein, and plenty of warming bites like sausages and fondue. A retro cocktail party can be really fun; our large margarita glass is perfect for this. Make some extra-large sized cocktails and guests can then share. Just remember to bring out plenty of “snowballs”! Also take some inspiration from our online blog, it's a great source of ideas to add an individual twist to your event.

Do you have any tips on catering for a large crowd (without drowning under the work)? Catering for any more than ten people can be a real challenge for cutlery and dishes. While you can hire, to be honest, the washing up and clearing can be endless. Disposables don't need to be expensive and can look sophisticated too. We stock some great clear plastic serving trays that set off your canapés



PERFECT PICKS FROM PARTY PIECES
White & Silver Snow Flake Fans, Silver 3D Hanging Stars, Porcelain Gold Assorted Medium Party Plates, Premium Silver Champagne Plastic Glasses. Browse the full range at partypieces.co.uk

a treat. Disposable glassware is a must too, with no chance of any breakages.

How can a host stay stress-free and actually enjoy their own party? The reception is such an important part of any gathering, so impress your guests as soon as they walk in with a dazzling drinks display and sophisticated canapés. I love our metallised tasting spoons, they're easy to use and just perfect for making canapés look professional! The larger the gathering, the more time you will want to allow for people to mingle, especially if you're having a sit-down meal later. A helper or two are always welcome when you're hosting a party, and enlist the help of younger guests to make sure glasses are kept topped up!

party planning

Can you recommend any good “ice-breaker” games? Fancy dress is an instant ice-breaker. Or a trivia quiz gets everyone involved – it's a great way to mix your guests up in teams so everyone gets to know one another. Another really fun idea that's very popular in our office is our Elfie Selfie Photo Kit.

Do you have tips for keeping younger generations entertained? Most children of any age won't be too interested in adult conversation, so why not give them a party of their own and set up a table especially for them? You can tailor the food and drink accordingly and add some fun craft things to make and do, like mask-making for the younger ones. Teenagers will love a “mocktail” party. Create lots of colourful, alcohol-free concoctions in our range of coloured plastic glassware. Or why not serve some sparkling elderflower for their own glass of fizz – a guaranteed hit!

What themes are you anticipating will be big this Christmas? Gold is a popular colour scheme this year. Our Porcelain Gold range has a wonderful classical print that looks great teamed with more modern touches like the Porcelain Gold LED table lights and table confetti stars. The party plates have a really vintage shape, almost a *Downton Abbey* feel. This is such a sophisticated and distinctive theme to have at a party.

What is Party Pieces like at Christmas – horribly hectic or huge fun? During last year's festive season we shipped tens of thousands of parcels, so things are always very busy and there's a real buzz in the warehouse and office. We hold a dress-up day in December for our favourite charity, which this year is the children's charity Rainbow Trust, and everyone really looks forward to our Christmas party! **w&h**

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PHOTOGRAPH GALLERY STOCK

LOOK ONLINE See our favourite buys from Party Pieces at womanandhome.com/partypieces