



**STRANGE TO SEE HOW A GOOD DINNER AND  
FEASTING RECONCILES EVERYBODY.**

*—Samuel Pepys, English artist in his Diary  
(1633–1703)*

36

# BUFFET PRESENTATION



THE PHONECIAN, Scottsdale, AZ



**AFTER STUDYING THIS  
CHAPTER, YOU WILL BE  
ABLE TO:**

- ▶ understand the basic principles of buffet presentation
- ▶ use a variety of techniques to create and maintain appealing buffets

A buffet offers diners all the dishes from a selected menu, usually at one time, in a single, attractive setting. A buffet offers food service professionals the opportunity to exercise their creativity by identifying themes and then creating menus, displays and decorations with these themes in mind.

In this chapter, we use the word *buffet* to describe both the event where all the dishes from a menu are served at once as well as the table on which these foods are displayed and from which diners serve themselves or are served by wait staff. Buffet foods can be, virtually, any of those found in this book.

### ▶ PLANNING THE BUFFET

Buffets must be carefully designed to provide foods from a planned menu in an attractive fashion to a given number of people within a specified time. Doing this well requires a collaborative effort among the chef, the catering sales staff and the dining room manager, banquet manager or other senior front-of-the-house staff. Together, they identify the theme for the event and choose the menu. If the event is designed for a specific client, then the client should be invited to join in the planning.

The **theme** sets the tone of the event. It defines a motif: an elegant Sunday brunch, a black-and-white formal, a Mexican fiesta, a Hawaiian luau. Regardless of the purpose for the event—a wedding, bar mitzvah, business luncheon, charity ball or the like—the theme defines the menu, decorations, props, linens and dinnerware; it can even define the music, lighting and wait staff uniforms. In Figures 36.1 through 36.4, we present examples of menus, decorations and buffet plans for various themed events.

Once the theme is identified, a **menu** is designed. Essentially, a lunch or dinner buffet offers an à la carte menu; the only differences are that at a buffet, the foods are presented all at once and the diners generally serve themselves or are served by wait staff stationed at the buffet table. Like an à la carte menu, the buffet menu should contain selections of first courses (soups and/or salads), entrées (hot and/or cold meat, poultry, fish and/or shellfish dishes), accompaniments (vegetables, starches and breads), desserts and beverages. Depending on the event, the menu may need to reflect particular dietary or religious concerns, such as the need for vegetarian entrées or kosher-style selections. Although costs are a consideration, the principal factors limiting a menu are the client's desires and the chef's imagination.

When planning the menu, it is important to offer dishes consistent with the theme. If the theme is a Greek wedding feast, do not offer tortilla chips and salsa. It may be necessary, however, to occasionally bend this rule in order to include one of the client's favorite foods or to offer an item not traditionally associated with the theme, such as beef at a Hawaiian luau.

It is also important to consider visual appeal and avoid repetition. Therefore:

- ▶ *Offer dishes featuring different principal ingredients*—This avoids repetition and offers diners a wider array of choices. Even fussy diners should be able to find something they want to eat. Therefore, if the buffet features two entrées, make one beef and the other poultry; if there is a third, use fish or shellfish. If there are two starch dishes, make one a pasta and the other a potato dish. Also, avoid repeating ingredients in different dishes; for

## KEEPING KOSHER

To one degree or another, many observant Jews keep kosher; that is, they adhere to dietary laws rooted in the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) and developed over the centuries by Jewish scholars. These laws (1) categorize foods and (2) define basic dietary principles.

**Kosher foods**—Only meat from animals that chew their cud and have split hooves can be eaten. These include cattle, goats, deer and other game; swine are not a kosher species. Poultry can be kosher, provided it is not from a bird of prey; thus, chicken, duck, goose and turkey are allowed, but hawk and eagle are not. Even if the species is kosher, the animal must still be slaughtered and butchered according to religious rules. For fish to be kosher, it must have both scales and gills; this eliminates catfish and eel, and no shellfish can be kosher. Dairy products are kosher if the species from which they come is kosher; for cheese to be kosher, it

must be made without rennet. Fresh fruits and vegetables are always kosher, as are baked goods, provided they are not made with animal fats. Commercially prepared foods marked with U, K or a similar symbol (often in a circle) indicates that the food product is kosher, the producer having used appropriate ingredients and met certain standards and its facilities having been inspected and approved by a rabbi.

**Kosher dietary principles**—All foods are either (1) meat, (2) dairy, or (3) pareve (parve). The principal dietary rule for keeping kosher is that meat and dairy foods cannot be cooked or eaten together. Over the centuries, this rule has been refined to the point that people keeping kosher will have two sets of cooking utensils, dishes and even dishcloths, one devoted to meat, the other to dairy, so that there is no accidental mixing. Particularly observant Jews will even wait for one to six hours after eating a meat dish before consuming a dairy dish.

Pareve refers to neutral (neuter) foods such as fruits, vegetables, breads, fish, eggs and certain commercially prepared foods that can be eaten with either meat or dairy items.

Not all Jews keep strictly kosher. Those who do will dine out only in a restaurant that regularly observes the same religious laws that they do at home, or in one that has been specially inspected and approved by a rabbi for the particular occasion (an option often used by catering facilities to accommodate kosher weddings, bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs and other Jewish celebrations). Other Jews will keep kosher by not eating any shellfish, meat, poultry or fish from nonkosher species or mixing dairy and meat, but they will not insist that separate meat and dairy cooking and eating utensils be used. They will generally dine in nonkosher restaurants, provided that the menu (sometimes referred to as “kosher-style”) offers appropriate selections from kosher species.

example, if the entrée is a stir fry of beef and broccoli, do not offer steamed broccoli as a vegetable side dish.

- ▶ **Offer foods cooked by different methods**—For example, serve beef bourguignon (a hot braised meat dish), roast turkey (a hot or cold roasted poultry dish) and salmon with dill sauce (a cold poached fish dish). Again, this avoids repetition.
- ▶ **Offer foods with different colors**—Fettuccine Alfredo and poached fish in a béarnaise sauce may both taste good, but they look boring next to each other. Offer a tomato and bell pepper salsa instead of the béarnaise sauce, or a pasta primavera in place of the Alfredo. This will increase the buffet’s visual appeal.

## KEEPING HALAL

Similarly, many Muslims follow dietary laws based on the Quran (the revealed book), the Hadith (the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) and the collective wisdom of Muslim scholars. *Halal*, which means “allowed” or “lawful,” refers to foods and beverages that can be consumed by observant Muslims. Foods and beverages that are *haram* are not allowed, and those that are of a questionable or suspect nature are referred to as *mushbooh*.

As all fruits and vegetables are halal, the majority of Muslim dietary laws address permitted and prohibited meats. Cooked (not raw)

beef, lamb and chicken are halal, provided the animals are slaughtered and butchered according to certain rituals and methods. Fish and shellfish are also halal. Pork, game, carnivorous animals, birds of prey, carrion (the meat of animals that died of natural causes), and blood are haram, as are products derived from them. Eggs and dairy products from permitted animals are halal, as are baked goods made with ingredients from permitted animals. Any halal food contaminated with blood, pork or other haram product is deemed haram and cannot be eaten. Alcohol, whether consumed as a bev-

erage, used as a flavoring or even present in a cleaning solution for dishes, is haram. Gelatin, emulsifiers, animal-based fats and certain dairy products are considered *mushbooh* unless certified as halal. Halal certification is often denoted as a capital H inside a triangle.

In food service operations, it is best if equipment dedicated solely to halal cooking is used. If this is impractical and the same equipment is used to cook halal and haram foods, the equipment must be thoroughly sanitized before it can be used for halal products. Normally, a careful visual inspection of the equipment suffices.



**1140** ▶ Buffet Presentation

- ▶ *Offer foods with different textures*—If two or more soups are served, make one a clear soup and the other a cream or purée soup; use a variety of tossed and bound salads, each with different principal ingredients.

When defining the theme and creating the menu, costs must be considered. Often a client will place a limit on what he or she wants to spend for the buffet. It is then the responsibility of the chef, sales staff and/or dining room manager to create an attractive and satisfying buffet that meets this budget, while providing a reasonable profit to the food service operation. One typical method of meeting these sometimes-conflicting needs is to plan a menu that balances both high-end and less expensive items.

### ▶ DESIGNING THE BUFFET

After the theme is set, members of the planning group should study the room, garden, patio or other space where the event will be held. They need to allocate space for the buffet table(s), the dining tables and, depending on the function, one or more bars, a dance floor, a stage for musicians, a podium for speakers, audiovisual equipment for presentations and so on. When doing so, common sense should be used: The buffet should be in an area with easy access to both the kitchen and the dining tables—neither the wait staff nor the diners should have to cross a dance floor or walk in front of a podium to get to the food. Similarly, a stage or podium should be within good sightlines of the dining tables.

Once the room's layout is determined, the chef and/or banquet or dining room manager decides on the shape of the buffet table. A buffet table is usually composed of one or more standard-sized tables grouped together in a functional and attractive shape. Standard table shapes and sizes are found in Table 36.1; arrangements of the various sizes and shapes are shown in Figures 36.1 through 36.4. The buffet table can then be draped with a floor-length linen tablecloth, or a tablecloth with a detachable skirt can be used. An alternative to standard-sized tables shrouded in linen is to use unique pieces of furniture such as cabinets, sideboards, consoles, armoires, desks or other furniture, draped with linens or not.

Table 36.1 **STANDARD BUFFET TABLES**

SHAPE	SIZES	SIZES FOR TABLECLOTHS OR SKIRTING
Rectangle	6 feet × 30 inches 8 feet × 30 inches	90 × 128 inches (floor length) 60 × 125 inches (lap length) or 90 × 153 inches (floor length)
Round	24-inch diameter 36-inch diameter 48-inch diameter  60-inch diameter  72-inch diameter	80-inch diameter (floor length) 96-inch diameter (floor length) 80-inch diameter (lap) or 108-inch diameter (floor) 96-inch diameter (lap) or 120-inch diameter (floor) 108-inch diameter (lap) or 132-inch diameter (floor)
Half-round	30-inch radius at 180° angle (i.e., half of a 60-inch diameter round)	160 inches of skirting
Quarter-round (wedge)	30-inch radius at 90° angle (i.e., one-quarter of a 60-inch-diameter round)	110 inches of skirting
Serpentine	Outside curve measures 8 feet, inside curve measures 4 feet, ends measure 30 inches (i.e., one-quarter of a circle's circumference)	Specialty cloths needed

### DÉCOR

**Linens:** buffet and dining tables draped with floor-length colored linens, buffet table with a contrasting overlay; linen napkins in the same colors as the tablecloths and overlay.

**Centerpieces:** fresh flowers (tulips, mums, lilies and greenery).

**Service ware:** polished stainless steel or brass trays and chafing dishes; ceramic bowls.

**Dinnerware:** white or ivory china, stainless flatware and plain stemware.

**Music:** none

**Wait staff uniforms:** bistro attire (white button-down shirts, long tie, black pants and long aprons).

### Menu

Sunset Salad of Mixed Greens,  
Citrus Wedges and Crispy Tortilla Frizzles  
with a Raspberry Vinaigrette

Caesar Salad with Herbed Croutons and Shredded Parmesan

Oven-Roasted Breast of Chicken with Wild Mushroom Sauce

Petit Salmon Fillet on a Bed of Pineapple Papaya Salsa

Dauphine Potatoes

Medley of Zucchini, Yellow Squash and Carrots

Assorted Rolls with Sweet and Flavored Butters

White Chocolate Cheesecake

with White Chocolate Curls and Caramel Sauce

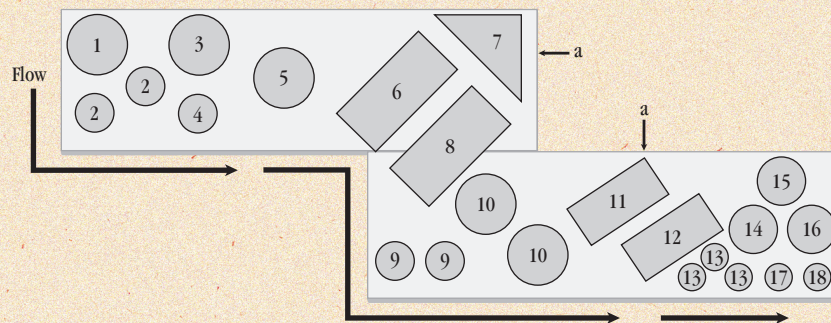
Fresh Fruit Platter

Chocolate Cabernet Torte with Raspberry Sauce

Iced Tea, Lemonade and Sparkling Water

French Roast Coffee

#### A SINGLE-SIDED BUFFET TO FEED 50 PEOPLE



The key for the buffet table

- a. Rectangular table, 8 feet  $\times$  30 inches
1. Basket of flatware rolled in linen napkins
  2. Dinner plates
  3. Sunset Salad

4. Raspberry Vinaigrette
5. Caesar Salad
6. Chafing dish of Vegetable Medley
7. Centerpiece
8. Chafing dish of Dauphine Potatoes

9. Sweet and Flavored Butters
10. Baskets of Rolls
11. Chafing dish of Chicken with Wild Mushroom Sauce
12. Chafing dish of Salmon Fillets
13. Dessert plates
14. Cheesecake
15. Fruit Platter
16. Chocolate Torte
17. Caramel Sauce for the Cheesecake
18. Raspberry Sauce for the Chocolate Torte

**Note:** Beverages will be in pitchers on the table and replenished by the wait staff; coffee will be offered by circulating wait staff.

FIGURE 36.1 ► Business Luncheon Buffet



## 1142 ► Buffet Presentation

MEXICANO

**C**rudités of Red and Green Bell Peppers, Carrots, Cauliflower, Broccoli, Jicama and Snap Peas with Sun-Dried Tomato Dip

**T**ri-colored Tortilla Chips with Fresh Tomato-Cilantro Salsa, Zesty Guacamole and Sour Cream

**W**arm Chorizo Chili Con Queso

**P**etit Blue Corn and Shrimp Tamales with Cilantro Cream

**S**oft Tacos of Grilled Pork Loin and Marinated Boneless Chicken Breast, Served with Ancho-Chile Honey Sauce, Tomato Cilantro Salsa,

**A**vocado, Grated Queso Blanco and Diced Tomatoes

**G**oat Cheese and Green Chile Chimichangas with Roasted Habañero Sauce




**F**resh Fruit Salad of Watermelon, Honeydew, Cantaloupe, Pineapple, Papaya, Berries and Grapes with Tequila Lime Splash

**M**exican Celebration Cookies

**P**añon Nut Tarts

**L**emon Curd Tarts

**M**ocha Mousse Cups with Cinnamon

**F**resh Roasted Mexican Coffee

**F**resh Mint Lemonade, Peach Iced Tea with Lemon and Sparkling Water

**A**ssorted Wines and Mexican Beers

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**DÉCOR**

**Linens:** buffet and dining tables draped in bright colors (yellow, orange, red, fuschia and/or turquoise) with overlays of brightly colored Mexican serapes; brightly-colored linen napkins tied with raffia.

**Centerpieces:** Large cacti in pots with raffia ties, surrounded with river rocks and sand.

**Buffet, table and room decorations:** piñatas, sombreros, fresh chiles, brightly colored paper flowers, brightly colored paper maché vegetables, raffia, small potted cacti in turquoise-painted terra cotta pots.

**Service ware:** copper or beaten tin trays, copper chafing dishes, wooden or earthenware bowls and platters.

**Dinnerware:** brightly-colored china (red, yellow and/or turquoise), hammered stainless steel flatware and Mexican green or blue glass stemware.

**Music:** strolling mariachi band.

**Wait staff uniforms:** jeans and white shirts with a colored serape over the shoulders.

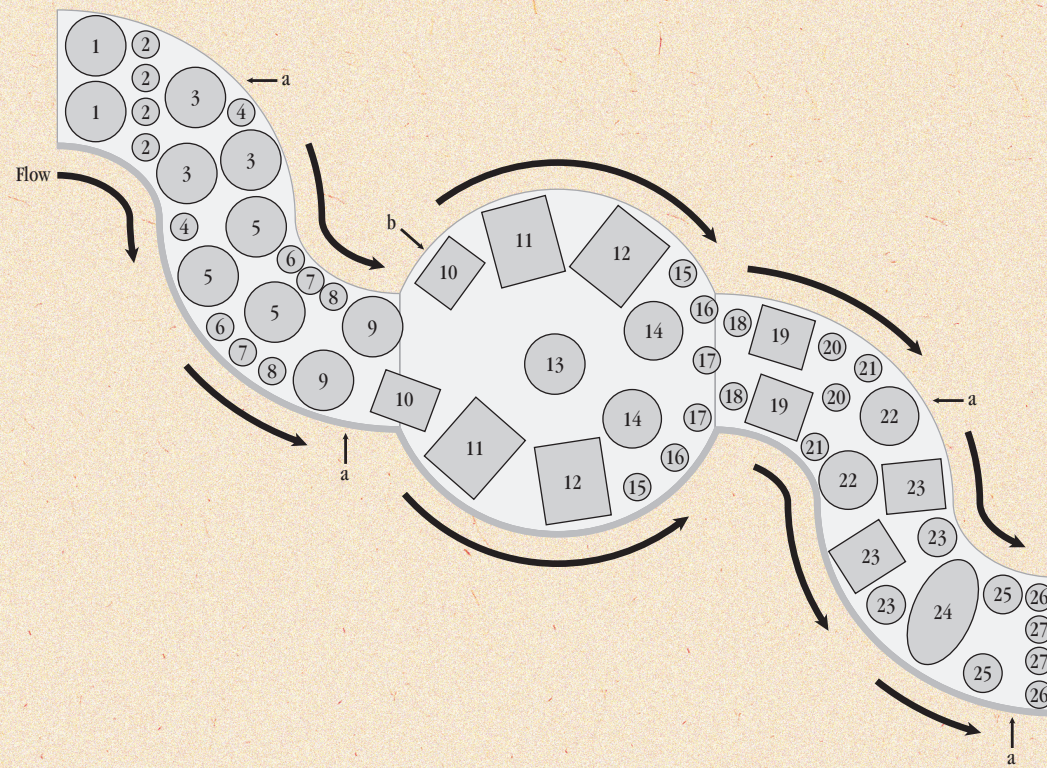
FIGURE 36.2 ► Mexican Fiesta

The number of diners is a critical consideration when determining the size, arrangement and placement of the buffet table. As a general rule, a single-sided buffet can comfortably serve 50–75 people. See Figure 36.1. If more than 100 guests are expected, the buffet should be designed with at least two service lines. See Figure 36.2. Even so, many guests will still have to wait in line, although their wait should not be excessive.

Several techniques can be used to serve large groups efficiently. One option is to use a double-sided buffet line. On a double-sided buffet, the same foods are served on both sides of the table. See Figure 36.2. All diners approach the table from the same direction and at the start of the buffet, the line is split, with half of the diners diverted to either side. Or a single-sided buffet can be divided into two, three or more zones, each of which offers the identical foods. See Figure 36.3. Either option requires that the buffet provide the diners with appro-



### A DOUBLE-SIDED BUFFET TABLE TO FEED 125 PEOPLE



#### The key for the buffet table

- a. Serpentine table, standard size
- b. Round table, 72-inch diameter
- 1. Flatware rolled in linen napkins
- 2. Plates
- 3. Crudités
- 4. Sun-Dried Tomato Dip
- 5. Tri-Colored Tortilla Chips
- 6. Fresh Tomato-Cilantro Salsa
- 7. Zesty Guacamole
- 8. Sour Cream
- 9. Chorizo Chili Con Queso

- 10. Chafing dish of Blue Corn and Shrimp Tamales with Cilantro Cream
- 11. Chafing dish of Soft Pork Tacos
- 12. Chafing dish of Soft Chicken Tacos
- 13. Centerpiece
- 14. Queso Blanco
- 15. Ancho-Chile Honey Sauce
- 16. Tomato Cilantro Salsa
- 17. Avocado
- 18. Tomatoes
- 19. Chafing dish of Goat Cheese and Green Chile Chimichangas

- 20. Habañero Sauce
- 21. Dessert plates
- 22. Fruit Salad
- 23. Platters of Cookies and Tarts
- 24. Coffee cups and spoons
- 25. Coffee
- 26. Cream
- 27. Sweeteners

**Note:** Beers and wines will be available at a separate bar; soft drinks will be in pitchers on the tables and replenished by wait staff.

appropriate visual cues to recognize that the two sides of the table or two ends of the table are offering identical fare.

Another option for serving larger crowds is to divide the menu among various stations that are scattered throughout the room or series of rooms. See Figure 36.4. One station can be devoted to cold salads or to an elaborate display of cold fish and shellfish surrounding an ice sculpture. Another can be devoted to pasta prepared to order by a line cook assigned to the station; equipped with a portable gas or electric burner, the chef can finish precooked pasta in the diner's choice of sauce. Other stations can offer roasted meats and poultry kept warm by an infrared heat lamp and carved to order by the station chef. See Figure 36.4.

The excitement and beauty of a well-designed buffet table depends principally on two factors: (1) the arrangement of the foods on their individual serving pieces, and (2) the arrangement of the foods and decorations on the buffet table.



1144 ► Buffet Presentation

**DÉCOR**

**Linens:** buffet and dining tables draped with blue denim tablecloths and red bandanna overlays; cobalt and red linen napkins with silver cow head napkin rings.

**Centerpieces:** fresh flowers (daisies, red mums and yellow lilies), decorated with barbed wire (dulled) and raffia.

**Buffet, table and room decorations:** lanterns, horseshoes, cowbells, miniature hay bales, leather saddles, saddle blankets and western rope.

**Serviceware:** tin and copper trays and copper chafing dishes, earthenware bowls.

**Dinnerware:** cobalt china on tin chargers, hammered stainless steel flatware and cobalt-rimmed stemware.

**Music:** Country and Western band.

**Wait staff uniforms:** cowboy and cowgirl outfits.

## Menu

*Fresh Fruit Salad of Watermelon, Honeydew, Cantaloupe, Pineapple, Papaya, Mango, Berries and Grapes*

*Platter of Chilled Carrots, Cauliflower, Broccoli, Asparagus, Snap Peas, Bell Peppers, Eggplant, Bermuda Onions, Summer Squash and Zucchini Marinated in Flavored Oils, Seasoned with Fresh Herbs and Grilled*

*Chilled Corn, Tomato and Confetti Pepper Salad with Creamy Basil Dressing*



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*Corn on the Cob Grilled in the Husk*

*Grilled Yukon Gold Potatoes with Red Chile Sour Cream and Butter*

*Mesquite-Grilled Breast of Chicken Marinated in a Tangy Barbecue Sauce*



*Chile-Rubbed Black Angus New York Strip Steak Grilled and Served with Chipotle Lime Sauce, Southwestern Béarnaise and Flour Tortillas*

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*Warm Blackberry Cobbler with Vanilla Bean Ice Cream*

*Strawberry Rhubarb Tarts with Fresh Whipped Cream*

*Judgy Homemade Brownies*

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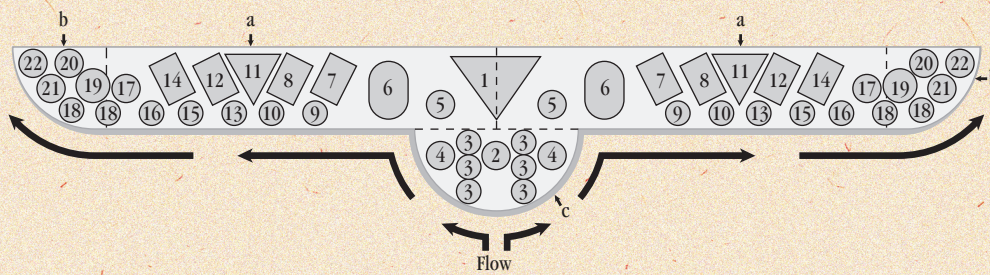


*Fresh Mint Lemonade and Sparkling Water*

*Kettle Coffee with Cream and Sweeteners*

*Assorted Wines and Beers*

A SINGLE-SIDED BUFFET TABLE DIVIDED INTO TWO ZONES TO FEED 150 PEOPLE



- |  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| The key for the buffet table             |   |  |   |
| a. Rectangular table, 8 feet × 30 inches | 5. Corn, Tomato and Confetti Pepper Salad | 12. Chafing dish of Barbecued Chicken    | 20. Brownies  |
| b. Quarter-round table, 30-inch radius   | 6. Grilled Vegetable Platter              | 13. Flour Tortillas                      | 21. Blackberry Cobbler  |
| c. Half-round table, 30-inch radius      | 7. Chafing dish of Corn on the Cob        | 14. Chafing dish of New York Strip Steak | 22. Vanilla Bean Ice Cream  |
| 1. Centerpiece                           | 8. Chafing dish of Grilled Potatoes       | 15. Chipotle Lime Sauce                  | <b>Note:</b> Beers and wines will be available at a separate bar; soft drinks will be in pitchers on the table and replenished by the wait staff; coffee will be offered by circulating wait staff. |
| 2. Prop or decoration                    | 9. Red Chile Sour Cream                   | 16. Southwestern Béarnaise               |   |
| 3. Plates                                | 10. Butter                                | 17. Prop or decoration                   |   |
| 4. Fruit Salad                           | 11. Prop or decoration                    | 18. Dessert plates                       |   |
|  |   | 19. Strawberry Rhubarb Tarts             |   |

FIGURE 36.3 ► Western Barbecue Buffet





*A small kitchen becomes the setting for an elegant and unusual brunch buffet  
The Hyatt Regency Scottsdale at  
Gainey Ranch, Scottsdale, AZ*

## ARRANGING FOODS ON SERVING PIECES

The chef is responsible for determining how the foods will be arranged on their serving pieces. Most hot foods will be presented in chafing dishes, while cold or room-temperature foods are usually served on trays, platters, bowls or mirrors.

Chafing dishes are metal dishes, usually rectangular or round, with a heat source (flame or electric) located beneath, which is used to keep the foods warm; the foods are usually placed in a hotel pan or other receptacle that sits inside the chafing dish above a pan of hot water. Chafing dishes are usually covered in copper, silver or stainless steel.

Trays, platters and mirrors for presenting foods are available in four basic shapes: square, rectangle, round and oval. They come in a wide variety of materials, including metal (silver, copper, tin and steel), ceramics (china and earthenware), glass, mirrors (glass and acrylic), plastic, wood and stone (especially marble). The choice depends on the theme. Silver and mirror trays create a more formal feel at an event; ceramic and wood lend a more casual look.

Once the tray, platter, bowl or mirror is chosen, the chef must artfully arrange the food on it. When designing the presentation, the chef should consider:

- 1 **Height**—The eye is naturally drawn toward the highest point on a tray; typically, this will be the centerpiece. It can be a garnish or a **grosse piece**. Although it is sometimes in the center of the tray, it is more often located toward the rear, either in the middle or off to one side. Foods placed at a level higher than the centerpiece usually distract from the overall appearance.
- 2 **Pattern**—Whenever possible, foods should be arranged in an interesting pattern. Three different types of canapés, each chosen for contrasting shapes, colors and textures, can march across a mirrored surface in alternating lines. Crudités can flow from baskets, hollowed squashes or bell peppers. Spirals of different pâtés can swirl around one another. Foods should generally flow toward the diner. Stack foods higher in the center or rear of the tray so that they cascade toward the front or edges. (Trays that



*Chafing Dish*

▶ **grosse piece** a centerpiece consisting of a large piece of the principal food offered; for example, a large wheel of cheese with slices of the cheese cascading around it

## 1146 ► Buffet Presentation

# Menu

## Buttered Hors d'Oeuvre

Red Potatoes with Gorgonzola, Bacon and Walnuts      Popovers with Shrimp and Chive Filling  
Mushroom Phyllo Triangles      Asparagus Spears tied with Red Pepper

## Buffet

### STATION ONE:

Tropical Fruit Display  
Caesar Salad with Herbed Croutons  
and Shredded Parmesan  
Salad of Bibb Lettuce and Blue Cheese  
with Citrus Vinaigrette  
Platter of Assorted Pâtés, Galantines and Ballotines  
Assorted Rolls with Sweet and Flavored Butters  
Tiered Display of Imported Cheeses including:  
Stilton, Saint Andre, Port Salut, Gouda,  
Black Diamond Cheddar and Brie Baked in Phyllo  
with Apricots and Fresh Basil,  
Garnished with Apple Slices and Grape Clusters  
Lavosh and Cracker Bread

### STATION THREE:

Herb-Rubbed, Grilled Tenderloin of Beef  
Carved by the Chef  
with Béarnaise Sauce and Sage-Merlot Sauce  
Assorted Rolls with Sweet and Flavored Butters  
Chicken Satay with Chile Peanut Sauce  
Grilled Shark with Tomatillo Sauce

### STATION TWO:

Antipasto of Assorted Salami, Prosciutto, Sliced Cheeses,  
Marinated Mushrooms and Artichokes, Olives,  
Roasted Peppers and Wedges of Papaya,  
Melon and Mango Wrapped with Prosciutto  
Penne with Fresh Tomatoes and Basil  
Tossed with Extra Virgin Olive Oil  
Cheese-Filled Tortellini with Wild Mushroom Alfredo Sauce  
Pastas Prepared to Order by the Chef  
Wheel of Parmesan  
Focaccia, Garlic Twists, Breadsticks and Assorted Rolls  
Sweet and Flavored Butters

### STATION FOUR:

Three-Tiered Wedding Cake  
bottom layer – Black Forest  
middle layer – White Cake with White Chocolate Mousse,  
Strawberries and Chocolate Ganache  
top layer – Carrot Cake  
Petit Fours  
Fruit Tartlets  
Chocolate-Dipped Strawberries  
French Roast Coffee and Hot Tea with Deluxe Condiments

Assorted Beers, Alcoholic Beverages, Still and Sparkling Wines, Sparkling Water and Soft Drinks

## DÉCOR

**Linens:** buffet and dining tables draped with floor-length ivory linens with overlays of tulle and lace, accented with gold ribbons and tassels; linen napkins tied with ribbons and tassels, and decorated with flowers.

**Centerpieces and decorations for the buffet stations and dining tables:** fresh flowers (calla lilies, white orchids, roses, tulips, ivy and greenery) and candles (votives, pillars or hurricanes) wrapped in ivy.

**Serviceware:** fancy silver and mirror trays, silver chafing dishes, china or glass bowls.

**Dinnerware:** ivory gold-rimmed china on gold chargers, silver flatware and gold-rimmed stemware.

**Music:** harpist, violinist or quartet.

**Wait staff uniforms:** tuxedos.

FIGURE 36.4 ► Formal Wedding Buffet

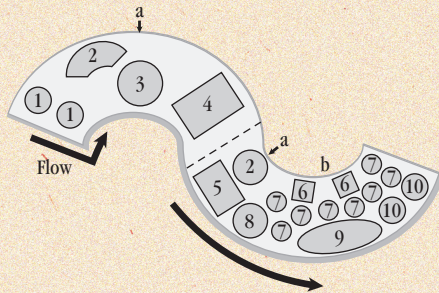
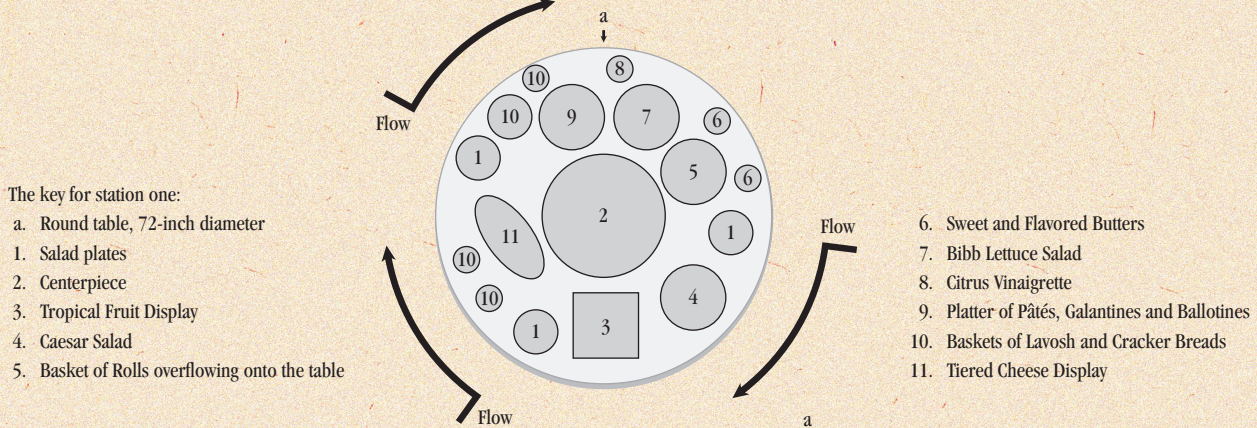


**A FOUR-STATION BUFFET (INCLUDING TWO STAFFED BY CHEFS) TO FEED 200 PEOPLE**

The key for station one:

- a. Round table, 72-inch diameter
- 1. Salad plates
- 2. Centerpiece
- 3. Tropical Fruit Display
- 4. Caesar Salad
- 5. Basket of Rolls overflowing onto the table

- 6. Sweet and Flavored Butters
- 7. Bibb Lettuce Salad
- 8. Citrus Vinaigrette
- 9. Platter of Pâtés, Galantines and Ballotines
- 10. Baskets of Lavosh and Cracker Breads
- 11. Tiered Cheese Display

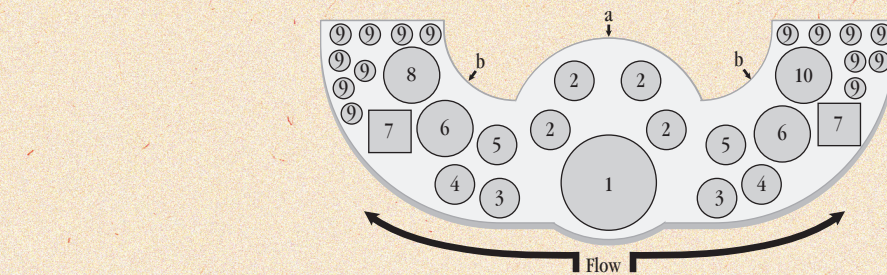
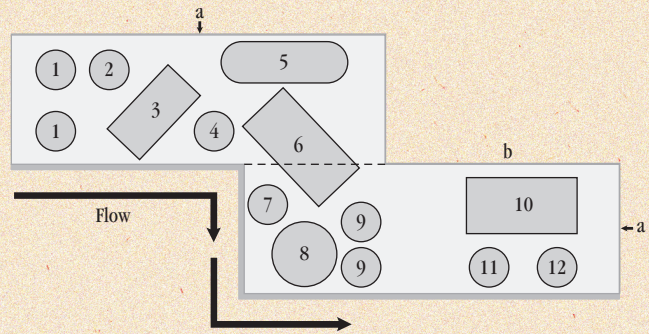


The key for station two:

- a. Serpentine table, standard size
- b. Chef's station
- 1. Plates
- 2. Centerpiece
- 3. Antipasto
- 4. Chafing dish of Penne Pasta
- 5. Chafing dish of Cheese Tortellini
- 6. Butane burners for chef
- 7. Garnishes for the pastas made to order including mushrooms,
- 8. Large hollowed wheel of Parmesan
- 9. Basket of Garlic Twists, Focaccia, Breadsticks and Assorted Rolls
- 10. Sweet and Flavored Butters

The key for station three:

- a. Rectangular table, 6 feet x 30 inches
- b. Chef's station
- 1. Plates
- 2. Decoration or prop
- 3. Chafing dish of Shark
- 4. Tomatillo Sauce
- 5. Centerpiece
- 6. Chafing dish of Chicken Satay
- 7. Chile Peanut Sauce
- 8. Basket of Assorted Rolls
- 9. Sweet and Flavored Butters
- 10. Carving station with heat lamp for the Tenderloin of Beef
- 11. Sage-Merlot Sauce
- 12. Béarnaise Sauce



The key for station four:

- a. Round table, 48-inch diameter
- b. Serpentine table, standard size
- 1. Three-Tiered Wedding Cake
- 2. Cake and dessert plates
- 3. Petit Fours
- 4. Fruit Tartlets
- 5. Chocolate-Dipped Strawberries
- 6. Tray of coffee mugs
- 7. Carafe of Hot Water with Assorted Tea Bags
- 8. Urn of Regular Coffee
- 9. Garnishes for Coffee including raw sugar cubes, artificial sweeteners, cream, whipped cream, candied citrus peel, mint swizzle sticks, cinnamon sticks, rock-sugar sticks and chocolate shavings
- 10. Urn of Decaffeinated Coffee

**Note:** Soft drinks as well as assorted wines, beers and other alcoholic beverages will be available at a separate bar; sparkling water, assorted wines and champagne will be served by the wait staff.



## 1148 ► Buffet Presentation



*A Variety of Canapés Displayed on Granite*

are higher around all the edges than in the center tend to draw the eye into the hole in the center.)

**3 Color**—The color of the principal foods should complement or contrast with each other. If they cannot (for example, a tray of pâtés or cheeses), they should be garnished with attractively contrasting colored foods such as fruits, vegetables and herbs.

**4 Texture and shape**—Try to use a variety of shapes and textures. Avoid building trays with circular slices of galantine garnished with circular liver mousse molds and round tartlets of a vegetable purée; all have the same shape and very similar textures. Instead, try molding the mousse or tartlets into different shapes or preparing a vegetable salad rather than a purée for the tartlets.

**5 Negative space**—This refers to the areas left unused. It is important because the space enhances the appeal of the object it surrounds and prevents overcrowding. Try leaving a border of space around the tray and some space within clusters of food on the platter.

## ARRANGING FOODS AND OTHER ITEMS ON THE BUFFET TABLE

When designing the shape of the buffet table, the chef and/or banquet or dining room manager must also consider how the various foods, centerpieces and props will be laid out on the table. Besides color, height, shape and texture, they should consider the following:

**1 Flow**—Regardless of whether a single buffet table, a main buffet table with one or more stations or only stations are used, the foods should be placed in a logical order that affords the diner the chance to construct a meal in the same order as one that would be served to him or her. The start of the buffet line should be obvious and accessible; usually, it is near the entrance to the room.

Typically, on a single- or double-sided buffet table, the first items offered the diner are plates. (Flatware and napkins can be located at the start or the end of the buffet or on the dining tables.) The first foods to be offered should be soups and salads. These should be followed by appetizers such as cold sliced meats, pâtés, shellfish and the like. Entrées should be next, along with their vegetable and starch accompaniments. Desserts should be the last items on the buffet. (Beverages can be available on the buffet table, at a bar, or on the dining tables or offered by circulating wait staff.)

Stations offer the designer greater flexibility. They also help minimize the line that usually forms at a single buffet table, allowing diners to go in various directions, although this can sometimes cause traffic problems. Like a single buffet table, each station can be designed so that it offers diners sufficient selections to create a complete meal. The stations can also be arranged around a room in a sequence mirroring a meal: soups and salads on the first station diners would approach, appetizers on the next, and so on. A third option is to arrange the stations so that the one with the most spectacular display of centerpiece, foods and decorations or the one featuring a chef making foods to order will be the center of attention, with the other stations scattered around the room. Regardless of how they are arranged, each should be self-contained with plates and accompaniments for the main items.





*Pasta Station  
The Phoenician, Scottsdale, AZ*

- 2 *Spacing*—Allow approximately 1 linear foot for each item on the buffet. Thus, if 16 items are to be placed on the table, including plates, a centerpiece and large props, then the buffet table must be approximately 16 feet long. If extremely large centerpieces are used or if food is presented on oversized platters, this will, of course, affect the total table space needed.
- 3 *Reach*—Try to place all foods within easy reach of the diners. Try to avoid stacking one item behind another. But if items must be placed farther back on the table, try setting them on **risers** or on pedestals in order to add height to the platter. This extra height not only adds visual interest, it allows the diner to reach over the dish in front without disturbing its arrangement. Also, if possible, place foods that will not drip or splatter behind ones that will; that way, sauce from the back dish will not drip into the front dish on its way to the diner's plate. Trays with foods that will not shift can be propped at a slight angle to make the contents more accessible and attractive.
- 4 *Accompaniments*—Place the appropriate garnishes, sauces or other accompaniments near their principal foods. Also, place a small plate or napkin near a platter for any serving utensils.
- 5 *Centerpieces*—A centerpiece brings focus to the buffet, and its height or dominance increases the visual appeal of the overall table design. A centerpiece can be a floral arrangement or a sculpture made of ice, tallow, pastillage, chocolate, blown or pulled sugar or other material. The centerpiece can also be a grosse piece such as a whole roast turkey or whole poached salmon decorated with sauce chaud-froid. See Chapter 27, Charcuterie.

► **risers** boxes (including the plastic crates used to store glassware) covered with linens, paper or other decorative items and used on a buffet table as a base for platters, trays or displays

**1150** ▶ Buffet Presentation

*Display of Fresh Fruit and Bread  
for Sunday Brunch Buffet  
The Phoenician, Scottsdale, AZ*

- 6** *Decorations*—In addition to the centerpiece, other nonedible objects or props may grace the buffet table. Sometimes, these are nothing more than smaller or modified versions of the centerpiece, such as flowers or leaves from a floral centerpiece. Of course, anything from a saddle to a silver candleabra can be used, depending on the buffet's theme. Whatever items are chosen, they should be well cleaned and arranged artfully but not in a manner that interferes with a diner's ability to see and reach the food. Props can also be used to mark divisions in the meal; for example, grouping all salads between one set of props divides them from the entrées. Sometimes, unusable or dead space will result because of constrictions of room or food. If it cannot be avoided, try filling the space with props or other decorations.
- 7** *Labels*—Unlike a restaurant with a printed menu and an attentive wait staff, an unattended buffet may not give the diner an opportunity to inquire about particular dishes. This can be remedied by placing attractively printed cards bearing the name of the dish in front of any items that the chef feels need identification.

## ▶ PRESENTING AND MAINTAINING THE BUFFET

### PORTIONING FOODS

A common problem when planning a buffet is overproduction. Many novice chefs want to make enough of each menu item to serve the entire group. But this is unnecessary. Most people tend to sample a little from many dishes and try not to gorge themselves. Some chefs use a simple, although far from fool-



proof, formula of 1 pound (450 grams) of food per person as a starting point and then adjust this number depending upon factors such as the general composition of the group (a luncheon for female executives may require less food than one for male football players), the number of items offered (the more dishes to choose from, the smaller the portions most people will take), the structure of the event (that is, whether it will be convenient for people to return to the buffet for second helpings), and whether diners serve themselves or are served by wait staff or chefs at the buffet.

Generally, portions should be small, especially if more than one item is served in each food category. For example, if a grilled salmon fillet with Lyonnaise potatoes and a medley of sautéed vegetables were served as an entrée from an à la carte menu, a typical serving would be 6 ounces (180 grams) of fish, 4 ounces (120 grams) of potato and 4 ounces (120 grams) of vegetables. If the same salmon fillet with its accompaniments were served as one of three entrées on a dinner buffet for 100 people, the total of available fish should be 2 to 3 ounces (60 to 90 grams) of fish per portion multiplied by 100 portions, 1 to 1.5 ounces (30 to 45 grams) of potatoes per portion multiplied by 100 portions and 1 ounce (30 grams) of vegetables per portion (diners tend to take smaller portions of vegetables than of starches) multiplied by 100 portions. Similarly, if a dessert tart from an à la carte menu had a 4-inch (10-centimeter) diameter, the version offered on a dessert buffet should have a 2-inch (5-centimeter) diameter.

Experience suggests that most diners tend to serve themselves larger portions of foods found at the start of the buffet than at its middle. Thus, if caviar is being served, it may make economic sense to place it somewhere farther down the line than at the start of the buffet.

## PRESENTING HOT FOODS

Keeping hot foods hot on a buffet is a particular challenge, and an important one, for both food safety and presentation concerns. If possible, hot foods should be served in relatively small quantities on warm platters that are exchanged frequently. This is not always possible, however. More often, hot foods are maintained in chafing dishes or under heat lamps.

## SAFETY ALERT

### BUFFETS

A properly maintained buffet is important for visual and culinary reasons. It is also important for food safety reasons. Because the public has access to the food, cross-contamination is a potential problem. In addition to keeping foods at the proper temperatures, the following steps should be followed:

- ▶ Do not add new food to old food in a serving dish or chafing dish.
- ▶ Do not use a chafing dish to heat food; make sure food is at the proper internal temperature before transferring it to a chafing dish or putting it under a heat lamp.
- ▶ Be careful of steam when changing pans in a chafing dish; do not leave the pan of hot water uncovered.
- ▶ Provide clean utensils for each dish and replace them often.
- ▶ Provide an ample supply of clean plates, so that diners do not reuse plates from which they have eaten.

## A BLOCK OF ICE, A CHAIN SAW, A CHISEL AND A LITTLE CAUTION AND CREATIVITY

Ice carvings have long been popular buffet centerpieces; they add elegance and sophistication to the setting and occasion. As with other arts, it may take years to master ice carving. Nevertheless, with some practice and care, you can usually create acceptable ice sculptures after only a few tries.

Blocks of carving ice are specially prepared to remove air bubbles. These large blocks (20 × 10 × 46 inches [50 × 25 × 115 centimeters]) weigh approximately 300 pounds (135 kilograms), and special ice tongs and caution are required when handling them.

At 0°F (−18°C), ice is very brittle and difficult to carve without breaking. Therefore, carving ice must be tempered before carving. To temper the ice, remove it from the freezer and

allow it to rest at room temperature for approximately 1 hour. When the surface is clear of frost, carving can begin.

A single carving can take from one to several hours to complete. Although chisels and specially designed saws for ice carving work quite well, chain saws are commonly used to speed up the process. Because most carving is done indoors, electric saws are used; unlike gas saws, they do not leave a greasy residue on the ice's surface. Be very careful when using any chain saw, particularly an electric one around melting ice and pools of water.

To begin, trace the outline of the figure you want to carve on the surface of all four sides of the block of ice. There are several excellent ice carving books, some of which provide stencils

for this purpose. Then start removing the ice using a large saw or a chainsaw. As the figure begins to take shape, use smaller chisels and specialized tools to create the desired effect. Some carvers use chain saws for the entire process, however. After some practice, you will develop your own style and preferences.

When the carving is complete, carefully return the ice to the freezer until needed. When setting it on a buffet, use a pan designed to hold an ice carving and provide drainage. Avoid placing ice sculptures under hot air vents. At room temperature and average humidity, ice melts at the rate of approximately ½ inch (1.2 centimeters) per hour from all sides. Keep this in mind when carving thin pieces or small details into the surface.

## 1152 ► Buffet Presentation



*Display of Fish and Shellfish for  
Sunday Brunch Buffet  
The Phoenician, Scottsdale, AZ*

To maintain the quality of foods kept in a chafing dish, use the following guidelines:

- Choose foods that hold well. Rare meats and delicate pastas do not hold well in a chafing dish; they become overcooked and unattractive quickly. Instead, try braised meats (which may actually benefit from the extended cooking) or hearty pastas such as tortellini or penne. This guideline also applies to garnishes: Bunches of delicate herbs such as basil do not do well in a chafing dish; instead, try sprigs of rosemary or thyme.
- Cook small amounts of delicate foods at a time and change the insert pan in a chafing dish often. This prevents foods from sitting too long.
- Ladle a small amount of sauce in the bottom of the pan before placing sliced meats in the pan, or serve sliced meats, poultry or fish on a bed of vegetables. The sauce or the vegetable bed helps to absorb the heat from the chafing dish, insulating the more delicate items and providing a bit of steam to help keep the foods moist.
- Keep the chafing dish closed whenever possible. This holds in the steam, which helps keep the food moist. But a closed chafing dish distracts from a buffet's appeal and slows down the flow of diners through the buffet line.

Heat lamps are generally used for keeping large cuts of meats or poultry warm during carving. These foods, however, become dry rapidly and should be replaced periodically. Of course, time and temperature principles of food safety must also be followed.



## PRESENTING COLD FOODS

Keeping cold foods cold on a buffet table is a little less of a challenge. As with hot foods, it is best if cold foods are served in relatively small quantities on cold platters that are exchanged frequently. Alternatively, the items can be set on a bed of ice—usually a large bowl filled with ice into which a smaller bowl containing the food is placed.

## REPLENISHING FOODS

Dishes from the buffet table should be removed when they are approximately two-thirds empty or have deteriorated in some fashion (for example, when the aspic on pâtés has softened, cut fruits have browned or a hot food has crusted over). Once the old dish has been removed, its fresh replacement should be placed on the buffet immediately, and it should be as carefully arranged and garnished as the original. If items from the old dish are to be combined with a replacement dish, this should be done in the kitchen and not at the buffet table. Batches of temperature-sensitive or potentially hazardous foods should not be combined, however.

## SERVING FOODS

Once the banquet or restaurant manager has completed the planning for a buffet, it usually falls to a captain to supervise the actual event. The captain directs the crew setting up the room as well as the stewards who bring the food, flatware, china and glassware from the kitchen to the buffet.

The captain also supervises the wait staff. One of the front waiters' principal responsibilities is to maintain the appearance of the buffet and to replenish items as needed. Depending on the function, front waiters can be stationed behind the buffet table to serve diners; circulate in the crowd with trays of hors d'oeuvre or drinks (passing foods in this fashion is called **butler service**) or serve beverages to diners seated at the dining tables. Back waiters generally police the room and clear tables. They should be particularly vigilant in removing used plates from a dining table after a diner has gone to the buffet for more food and before he or she returns to the dining table with a new plate.

Typically, servers or chefs are placed only at stations where foods are prepared or carved to order. This helps to control portioning. It also provides a greater opportunity for staff to police the buffet and therefore ensure that the table and the individual items remain neat, attractive and fresh. Finally, placing wait staff or kitchen staff at the buffet allows diners to ask questions about the foods presented.

### CHEF JAMES BOYCE THE PHOENICIAN RESORT

The Phoenician Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, is one of America's premier resorts. It offers several dining options, including the award-winning fine-dining room Mary Elaine's. Sunday brunch is a popular event at The Phoenician, especially in the Terrace Dining Room, where chefs create a lavish multistationed buffet utilizing interior spaces and exterior patios. The Terrace's Sunday brunch buffet, which is pictured in the preceding pages, typically serves 450 guests and is prepared and maintained by 20 cooks. It takes the staff 12 hours to set up some 13 stations for each week's 4-hour-long brunch. In addition to a wide selection of hot and cold entrées, meat and poultry carving stations, fresh fruits and vegetables, pasta, salads, pâtés, freshly baked breads and pastries, guests enjoy four varieties of imported caviar and consume an average of 120 pounds of boiled shrimp.

The culinary team at The Phoenician is led by Chef James Boyce. Chef Boyce's culinary career had humble beginnings in a Poughkeepsie, New York, bakery, where at age 14 he landed his first job making bagels. Later he was fortunate to work under the expert tutelage of the legendary Daniel Boulud at New York's famed Le Cirque. It was his stint at this internationally acclaimed eatery that inspired Chef Boyce to study at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. After completing his studies, he continued to work at Le Cirque for a time, then traveled west as a sous-chef for Mary Elaine's. After five years with The Phoenician, he moved to Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas as chef de cuisine at Palace Court. In 1995, he joined Loews Coronado Bay Resort as executive chef. During his time there, he became known as one of San Diego's leading chefs, earning critical acclaim and numerous accolades. He recently returned to The Phoenician as culinary director. In this new position, Chef Boyce serves as chef de cuisine and general manager of Mary Elaine's and lends his expertise and vision to the other food and beverage venues.

Chef Boyce's fierce love of the kitchen is unwavering. "Cooking is in my blood," he says. "You either have the passion for it or you don't. It's that simple."

**1154** ▶ Buffet Presentation**CONCLUSION**

A buffet is more than a salad bar at a restaurant—that is, merely food laid out for the diner to grab. A buffet is an opportunity for a chef to use his or her creativity to plan and present an entire menu in an attractive fashion. But for a buffet to succeed, it requires careful planning, attention to detail and the help of many professionals in the food services facility.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1** What is a grosse piece? How is it different from a centerpiece?
- 2** What food safety and sanitation factors must be considered when planning a buffet? Explain your answer.
- 3** Describe three things that can be done to keep hot foods attractive and fresh when using a chafing dish.
- 4** Describe two things that can be done to keep cold foods cold on a buffet.
- 5** List five different stations serving hot foods at a buffet and the equipment necessary for each.
- 6** Redesign the Western-themed buffet in Figure 36.3 to include three stations.
- 7** Where can you go for current information on new trends and styles of buffet arrangements? What resources are available to assist caterers in business management?

