

GOTHAM

Farm-to-Table Catering with Neumark

by Sylvie Bigar



A striking mosaic of color and form appears on the plate: perfectly tender, grassy ribbons of zucchini and wafer-thin hamachi hors

d'oeuvres. There's an artist's touch. But this isn't El Bulli or Jean Georges; it's a benefit catered by the mega event-production group GREAT PERFORMANCES at The Plaza Hotel, and the artist overseeing it all is Liz Neumark.

Her keen eye for presentation comes courtesy of her background as a photographer, which shapes many aspects of the business. "Our roots are in the arts," explains the elegant, punkish dynamo, who founded the party planning company in 1979 as a way to supplement her income as a photographer and give female artists access to flexible jobs. "Our secret ingredient is our wonderful servers, who come predominantly from the arts."

Today, GREAT PERFORMANCES employs 150 people, with 600 part-timers on call for events throughout New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. Neumark also helps her clients choose from 136 venues, perhaps selecting a Soho loft, Wave Hill, BAM or Jazz at Lincoln Center for a view of Central Park.

Neumark's current passion? The Plaza, where she now handles events exclusively. "Everyone has

an emotional connection with that building," she says. "It's quintessential New York, and I still cannot believe I'm part of it."

For 20 years, Neumark dreamed about acquiring a farm. In 2006 she closed on what would become Katchkie Farm, a 60-acre property in upstate New York, and today her clients feast on its organic bounty. Her trademark, literally and figuratively, is the "100-mile menu" emphasizing local and seasonal food. "If someone wants asparagus in December, I tell them I can do that, but it won't be as great as if it came out of the ground that morning. We don't lecture," she adds, "but we aim to educate."

Neumark knows that food can become a commodity in a catering business, but what matters to her is the best possible flavor. "If we connect ourselves to the building blocks, meaning participate in growing food," she says, "and if we put our love into it, I think our clients can taste it."



Photo credit: Chris Eastland

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