

# THE ART OF THE TABLE

THE SILVER LINING OF ENTERTAINING

BY ANGELA CARAWAY-CARLTON



Justin Trabert, brand ambassador for Christofle. Right: Christofle silver table setting.



**PROPER ETIQUETTE.** Just hearing those words can send a dinner party host into an apocalyptic panic. Questions race through your mind: Where do I place the salad forks? What about the water glasses? All of a sudden, your fun soiree is soured by formality.

To alleviate these fears, Justin Trabert, the 37-year-old national brand ambassador for French silver-maker Christofle, created the "Art of the Table." During this four-course dining journey, Trabert goes through the history of dining etiquette, making it approachable for everyone – especially a modern generation that isn't trained in table setting.

Instead of focusing on enforcing rigid rules, Trabert explains where the rules of etiquette originated and why we do what we do. "I don't tell people, 'Yes, you must do this, or no, you can't do that,'" he says. "It removes the negativity and intimidation surrounding the word etiquette."

Trabert and his team will come to your home or preferred venue, bring all the glam Christofle pieces to set the table, and help you come up with a menu. Basically, they take care of the entire process. "The host doesn't have to do any of the work," explains Trabert. "They get to attend their own dinner party and enjoy their guests."



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Above: The elegant simplicity of an all-white table.  
Right: Formal entertaining makes a comeback in silver and gold.



Depending on how elaborate the party, prices vary from \$3,000 to \$4,000 and the sky is the limit from there. Or, you can join Christofle's mailing list so you can attend one of Trabert's Art of the Table parties.

Trabert explains that he's the "entertainment" for the night, and he tries to find a balance between being informative and fun. "When there is a lull in courses, I will chime in, give more history and more facts," he says. "It's very relaxed. If you've ever had a question and didn't want to ask, now is the time."

He likes to remind guests that it's not a scene from the ultra-proper show "Downton Abbey." "I was born and raised in Kansas," Trabert says. "My mom taught me to sop things up with bread, so there is little that offends me at the table."



## TRABERT'S TOP TRICKS

- ◆ "Bread plates are placed to the left of the plate and glasses to the right. I tell my clients it's easy to remember if you put your index finger to your thumb on each hand. The result is something that resembles a 'b' (for bread) on the left hand and a 'd' (for drinks) on the right."
- ◆ "The rule of thumb: The middle crease to the tip of your thumb is about one inch for everyone, a humanity oddity. If you wrap your thumb over the end of table, it's a ruler for setting plates and flatware one inch from edge of the table. It makes everything look uniform and elegant."

He does, however, give credit to shows such as "Downton Abbey" and the remaking of the film "The Great Gatsby" for enticing the younger generation to entertain. He says millennials are taking a greater interest in formal entertaining and hosting sit-down dinners at their dining room tables. "No longer are we seeing people sitting in front of the TV eating," he adds.

While Trabert doesn't focus on the definitive rules of etiquette, there is one rule that he will never break: "Etiquette rules were set to welcome people into your home and so dinner progressed with ease, not to make them uncomfortable," he says. "If there is someone that doesn't follow proper etiquette, you as the host need to make them feel at ease." ■

*For more information, email Justin Trabert at [j.trabert@christofle.com](mailto:j.trabert@christofle.com). Christofle, 9700 Collins Avenue, Suite 216, Bal Harbour | 305.864.0330*

## TABLE TRENDS

- ◆ "Gold is back. But it's not like the '80s where everything was covered in gold. We are seeing elements of gold: gold with silver, gold with wood, gold on the rim of your glass. I think it ties back to traditional entertaining but in a new form."
- ◆ "The fish knife is becoming obsolete and is being replaced with the gourmet sauce spoon. It's flat and enables guests to scrape the sauce off the plate. Now you can appreciate the sauce that is served with your food."
- ◆ "I'm a stickler for all-white. I love white flowers because they're usually not too fragrant that they kill the palate. I just love the simplicity of an all-white table."