



Invite guests to hunt for buried treasure—colorful shells and beach glass—in the sandbar.

setting the scene

the look Go with a beachy palette of blues, sandy neutrals and splashes of soft shell pink. In the entryway welcome guests with the luxurious scent of a potted jasmine plant and hang strands of capiz shells (opposite) so that they delicately tinkle every time someone walks into the party. Lay sea-grass mats on the living room floor and arrange tropical leaves or palm fronds in glass vessels on side tables. Make a mini sandbar in the center of the coffee table: Fill a long narrow tray with sand and top with little palm trees (6" sago palms, \$30–\$35 each; at nurseries or smithandhawken.com). Bury a variety of colorful shells and beach glass in the sand and invite guests to dig for them with the help of tiny wooden rakes (Zen Garden rakes, \$9 each; mudmom.com). Create little beachscapes in glass hurricanes with sand and shells, and set them on the bar and side tables.

the menu Serve light and tasty nibbles, like shrimp with mango salsa and jerk chicken bites, that conjure the spicy-sweet character of Jamaican food. Toward the end of the party bring out island-theme sweets: macaroons (plain or chocolate-dipped) and a tropical-fruit platter.

the music Get guests into a summery groove with upbeat cocktail music: *Nouvelle Vague* (V2), *Gorillaz* (Virgin) and *Guero* by Beck (Geffen). Wind down with *Replenishing Music for the Modern Soul: Buzzin' Fly Volume 2* (Astralwerks).

BEVERAGE SERVICE: WHAT TO POUR

Raspberry Rum Punch

(Serves 20)

In punch bowl crush 1 pint raspberries into 1 cup sugar syrup (to make syrup: heat 1 cup each sugar and water over low heat, stirring until dissolved. Increase heat to medium; simmer 2 minutes. Let cool; chill before using). Add 4 cups each club soda, dark rum and fresh lime juice, plus $\frac{2}{3}$ cup superfine sugar. Ladle into ice-filled glasses; garnish with raspberries and lime slices.

wine picks Complement the salsa's fruit flavors with sweet white options: Kendall-Jackson riesling 2004 (\$10) or Columbia gewürztraminer 2003 (\$9). Or go for a sauvignon blanc like Monkey Bay 2004 (\$10). Want reds? Stick with fruity pinot noirs such as Edna Valley 2003 (\$16) or Beringer Napa Valley 2003 (\$16). And beer, such as Jamaican import Red Stripe, always goes great with spicy foods. Set out a bowl of macadamia nuts as an island-style bar snack.



Raspberry rum punch is a riff on the Caribbean classic.

For more information about tabletop and décor items see Credits in the back of the magazine.

Set the mood with a lushly scented jasmine plant and strands of capiz shells.



SAVE MONEY—OR TIME

- ▶ Forget the palm trees for the sandbar centerpiece and sub small pineapples from the supermarket instead. Or use big ones, but cut off the bottom two-thirds, cover the cut end with foil, and set into the sand.
- ▶ Substitute store-bought jerk marinade for the homemade version. Freshen it up with a squeeze of lime juice and a sprinkle of fresh minced cilantro.
- ▶ Instead of roasting sweet potato rounds, top store-bought gourmet sweet potato chips with the black bean cream (or serve just the chips).
- ▶ Skip making mango salsa from scratch and buy a ready-made version from a gourmet grocer, or

replace with a fresh tomato salsa from the refrigerated section of your supermarket.

- ▶ Rather than assembling gift bags of island goodies (little bottles of Jamaican rum, beachy rope bracelets and a fresh or faux hibiscus bloom, as above), simply arrange mini rum bottles in a big wooden bowl and invite guests to select a couple on their way out.

make it a dinner party

Feel like throwing a sit-down dinner instead of a big cocktail party? You can easily turn this gathering into an intimate meal for 10 or 12.

- ▶ Make the dining table the setting for the mini sandbar: It can be a fun, interactive centerpiece.
- ▶ Transform the dining room into a tropical oasis: Place large potted tropical plants or ficus trees in corners and set up a bar on a buffet or server with tropical leaves in clear glass vases. Use a blue batik cloth on the table and elephant leaves as chargers.
- ▶ Light the room with the beachscape hurricanes and a scattering of reflective votives.
- ▶ Offer the shrimp with salsa as the first course.

For the main course make entrée-size scallion beef skewers or jerk chicken; serve with a green salad and the roasted sweet potato rounds. For dessert set out a tropical-fruit platter and island-style sundaes of caramel sauce over coconut ice cream, sprinkled with toasted coconut and crushed macadamia nuts.



Use tropical leaves as chargers.

countdown

- three weeks** Call guests or send invitations; ask everyone to wear beachy attire. Order tropical plants, sand, shells, and palm fronds or leaves.
- two weeks** Order other décor details, music and items for gift bags.
- two days** Pick up plants.
- day before** Buy cocktail napkins, bar items and groceries. Marinate shrimp, beef and chicken (separately).
- morning of** Set up living room and bar tables. Make black bean cream for sweet potato rounds, cilantro-pesto dip and mango salsa; refrigerate all.
- four hours** Make punch and refrigerate (add soda right before serving).
- three hours** Prep chicken, beef skewers; refrigerate.
- two hours** Bake sweet potato rounds; keep warm in low oven. Grill shrimp.
- one hour** Set up bar and put out macadamia nuts and plantain chips.
- half hour** Cook jerk chicken and beef skewers; keep warm in oven.
- 10 minutes** Light candles, start music and fill punch bowl. Arrange appetizers on platters; pass or set on tables. Bring out dip for plantain chips.
- Later in the party** Bring out the macaroons and tropical-fruit platter. Arrange gift bags so guests can grab one as they leave.