

# Tea for 24

JUST-RIGHT TOUCHES MAKE FOR A SWEETLY  
ELEGANT BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

**TRUE—THE MAD HATTER WASN'T IN ATTENDANCE** this sunny June day. But even so, as 12 mother-daughter pairs gathered under a white tent to enjoy tea sandwiches and scones, the scene seemed something from a storybook.

The occasion: The ninth birthday party of Mackenzie Rohde of Franklin Lakes. Her mom, Debbie, had won a "High Tea Event" at a charity auction for Tuxedo Park School in Tuxedo Park, N.Y., which Mackenzie attends.

"Mackenzie is such a girly girl—she likes to get dressed up, and she used to have little tea parties with her American Girl dolls," Rohde explains. "I knew the party would be something she'd love."

The visionary behind the event was friend and interior designer Marina Alario of The Red Shutters in Warwick, N.Y. For the auction she offered not only her services, but also her bucolic 5-acre Warwick property, anchored by a lake, barn and Federal-era home. To transform the expansive space into a sweetly feminine retreat, she focused her keen design eye on getting all the whimsical touches just right—beginning with the locale.

To keep the party cozy and contained, she had a tent erected in a particularly idyllic spot. "A tent creates a room within a large property, so we tucked one against the side of the yard near a tree, along a path to the pond with great views," says Alario.

The real fun, however, came in designing the beautiful tablescape, set in a notoriously girl-friendly palette. "Once I knew the party was for Mackenzie, I immediately pictured pink



Sweet and dainty were in high supply as Mackenzie Rohde of Franklin Lakes celebrated her ninth birthday with a mother-daughter tea party.





and green," says Alario. "She's just that way—she always has ribbons in her hair, and I thought this would be something she might like."

For the elegant-yet-simple place settings, Alario had a trick up her sleeve: her own collection of antique porcelain tea accoutrements, including a variety of dishes, teacups, tea urns, creamers and delicate vessels to hold sugar, butter and jam. From the flowers (low-sitting arrangements of pink roses and hydrangeas) to the polka-dotted ribbons tied on the tables, chairs and favors, shades of pink and green punctuated the whole gathering. Even the cupcakes and teapot cake were decked out in the trademark hues.

"I always recommend color continuity—using the same shades for everything—for parties," Alario says. "It pulls the theme together."

Rohde, meanwhile, did some party prep of her own. "We bought little pearl necklaces and white gloves for all the girls," she says. "I got Mackenzie a special dress from the Rugged Bear in Ridgewood and we embellished her hat with pretty pink and green flowers to match." As the guests arrived in hats and sundresses, as requested, the party officially got under way.

Before tea was served, a "Miss Manners" type spoke about basic rules of proper etiquette. Then out came the delicacies from Charlotte's Tea Room in Warwick. A menu of cream-cheese-and-cucumber sandwiches (plus peanut butter and jelly for less-adventurous young ones), scones, petit fours, cookies, cakes and cupcakes, plus flavored hot and iced tea, delighted both generations.

"The girls sipped their tea with their pinkies out," Rohde remembers. "It was very cute." As teatime wound down, moms began to mingle and the girls played quietly on the lawn. Each guest went home with an etiquette book (either *Tiffany's Table Manners for Teenagers* or *The London Ritz Book of Afternoon Tea*) and a teacup and saucer brimming with candy.

"Everyone was well-behaved," notes Rohde. "It was an elegant lunch and they were all happy to be little ladies. After it was all over, Mackenzie said 'It was the best party ever, Mom.' And to have someone plan it with such exceptional detail made it absolutely perfect." ■



#### EXPERT TIPS

### *By invitation only*

Invitations are your guests' first glimpse of your party plans. These important initial introductions let attendees know whether to prepare for a simple summer shindig or a more elaborate evening soirée. Find the invite that best suits your style with these suggestions:

**ELECTRONIC:** To keep it casual, e-mail guests a free electronic invitation from a site like Evite ([www.evite.com](http://www.evite.com)). You can choose from hundreds of designs for various occasions and check RSVPs directly online.

**PREPRINTED:** Shops like Papyrus ([www.papyrusonline.com](http://www.papyrusonline.com)), Crane & Co. ([www.crane.com](http://www.crane.com)) and Kate's Paperie ([www.katespaperie.com](http://www.katespaperie.com)) stock a wide selection of personalized stationery and preprinted invites. Simply buy in bulk, address to guests and drop them in the mail.

**SEMICUSTOM:** At companies like Paperbuzz ([www.paperbuzz.com](http://www.paperbuzz.com)) and By Invitation Only Designs ([www.byinvitations.com](http://www.byinvitations.com)) you select from a variety of existing invitation templates, and choose your own wording, colors and text font.

**CUSTOM ENGRAVED:** Want total control? Check out Alpine Creative Group (these high-end custom invites are a favorite among celebs, as noted on page 16; [www.alpinecreativegroup.com](http://www.alpinecreativegroup.com)), Bowne & Co., Stationers (19th-century letterpresses lend all notes an old-world feel; 212-748-8651) and Dempsey & Carroll (this 128-year-old shop still uses old-fashioned engraving techniques; [www.dempseyandcarroll.com](http://www.dempseyandcarroll.com)).

—Francesca Moisin