

THE RADAR PARTIES

PRODUCED BY TONY CONWAY
TEXT BY TRAVIS NEIGHBOR WARD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY YVONNE BOYD



The front person is the best-dressed of the valet attendants, and often in white gloves.

NO PARKING, BABY! *Bring on the red-carpet treatment at home*

Whether you're throwing a lavish soiree for 100 or a dinner party for 12, having a charming crew on hand to park guests' cars is sure to impress. "The invitation you send is your first opportunity to make a good impression and the second is the moment guests arrive," says Tony Conway, president of A Legendary Event and our contributing editor of entertaining. That's especially important if the weather's bad, parking spaces are limited or you have a long driveway. "Ladies won't be happy if they have to hike to your party in their Jimmy Choos," he says.

But, valet parking, Conway adds, is more than just attendants in red jackets trading keys for a ticket—there's definitely an art to it. Here are his top tips for doing it in style.

Figure out what you're up against. First and foremost, determine how much parking is available and if you need to secure additional parking nearby. If you're hosting the party at your home, scope out parking options on side streets. Plan to put notes in neighbors' mailboxes on the night of the event telling them who to call if cars are blocking their exit. If you have a narrow, one-lane driveway, consider arranging for a luxury golf cart or SUV chauffeured by valet attendants.

Set a number. Determine how many guests will probably attend, then aim for about one valet attendant per 35 guests if the distance from the cars to the party is two blocks or less; if the distance is greater, you may need to up the ratio to avoid long waits for cars. "If you're going to skimp on valet parking, it's better not to offer it at all," says Conway. In addition, consider hiring police officers for traffic control if the space is difficult to enter and exit. Expect to pay about \$150 per valet for four hours of service, though the pricing varies per company.

Interview potential companies. Don't be tempted to hire college students, Conway says. "The professional valet services know what they're doing and can keep up the pace." He often hires AAA Parking (404.525.5959), AmeriPark (678.303.5946) and Laz Parking (404.266.9391). Set up a meeting at the party location to discuss arrival and start times, number of attendants, dress code, and how you will communicate with them before, during and at the end of the event. A front person at the door in a nice outfit, and possibly equipped with white gloves and a headset, is a must.

Expect the worst. "I always plan for rain," Conway says. So, discuss what attendants will wear if it rains, whether they will carry umbrellas, and how they will protect car interiors from getting wet. One of Conway's tricks is to have attendants put a towel on the driver's floorboard before they get in, then remove it before they return the car. "When we've had to park cars in a field, we've even hooked up temporary water hoses so we can spray down the tires before we return them."

Get it in writing. The contract should include the terms and a copy of the company's proof that it is bonded and insured. Read the contract thoroughly before you sign it, and get a copy. "There might be a glitch," says Conway. "Ask the service how they will handle it."

Remember they're your last impression, too. "Having the valet attendants do something special for guests as they depart is a great way to add a memorable touch," says Conway. They can leave party favors, such as bottled water and sugar cookies or a personal note from you, on the console of each car. "Just don't put chocolate, or anything else that could damage the interior!" 