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THE VISIONARY CATERER

Kathleen Schaffer is the fiery force behind some of LA's most memorable events.

By Shelley Levitt



Kathleen Schaffer likes to think outside the box ... and the bowl, plate or even the banquet table. With her husband Charlie, she co-owns Schaffer, one of the leading event catering and hospitality companies in Southern California. She's also the eight-year-old company's creative director, guiding a staff of roughly 100 in executing some 500 memorable events a year for the likes of Amazon, Disney, Nike, Sephora, Snapchat, Nordstrom, Lamborghini, Tesla and Facebook. "We want to create a restaurant-quality experience for our corporate clients that captures their culture and message," she says. "Seeing that vision come to life is truly the greatest reward."

For the kickoff party of the 2017 E3 gaming summit in downtown Los Angeles this past June, Schaffer developed a "post-apocalyptic" menu designed around the themes of Bethesda's various games. The 1,800 guests enjoyed turkey legs wrapped in parchment paper, miniature lobster rolls in black buns, a popcorn bar with branded "Fallout" flavored salts in Sriracha lime, bacon and cheddar, and green apple; charred Mexican-style street corn to evoke the "Quake" game; and, for "Evil Within," soft-serve black ice cream made with digestive charcoal.

At the IMAX Global Summit 2017 the "around the world lunch station" included international cuisine to highlight the global importance

of the summit. There was fattoush salad from the Middle East; mini muffuletta sandwiches as a shout-out to New Orleans; roasted tilefish Provençal to evoke the South of France; Indian-inspired Tandoori grilled chicken; a Moroccan-style vegetable tagine; coconut quinoa to salute Thailand; a traditional orecchiette Bolognese to commemorate Italy; and a sweets station that included Mexico's chocolate churros and Russia's beet coconut macaroons.

Each event is preceded by a staff gathering in the "situation room" to anticipate everything that might possibly go wrong. When the team concocted a specialty cocktail made with very high-proof tequila that would be served in skull glasses and lit on fire, the placement of every fire extinguisher was reviewed. "We want everything, including our drinks, to be about the guest experience," says Schaffer, who started her culinary career working at local restaurants as a teen in her hometown of New Hope, Pennsylvania, before going on to earn an arts degree from New York University and then launch her first catering company, called Food Fetish. These days she's crazy about "roaming buffets," passed trays of composed small plates. "That way the party keeps moving," she says, "and guests keep mingling, while we stay in the background, where we belong." schafferla.com