

Southern Living®

SUMMER ESCAPES

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Lakes,
Rivers,
Beaches,
and
Other
Southern
Hideouts

**PORCH
COCKTAIL
GUIDE**

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LET'S CELEBRATE

A Festive Backyard Fourth

Kelly Revels and Bryce Vann Brock—the duo behind St. Simons Island, Georgia's The Vine—host an all-fun, no-fuss Independence Day. Best part? Their tricks never go out of style, so keep them for when it's safe to throw a party

BY BETSY CRIBB AND GRACE HAYNES | PHOTOGRAPHS BY HECTOR MANUEL SANCHEZ



Get the Party Started Inside

"Entertaining outdoors in the summer is tricky in the South," says Vann Brock. "Instead of immediately putting all of your guests in the backyard, have cocktail hour inside and let everybody mingle. Move outdoors for dinner when there's still light but it's cooled off."



Pull Up a Seat

“People feel like they need to have a set of six or eight chairs in their garage that they keep on hand for outdoor entertaining,” says Revels. “Why not use what you already have? We brought out chairs from the home’s dining room and moved a couple from around the pool.”



Easy Arrangements

Shape bouquets with lots of budget-friendly blooms (like carnations) and greenery. Fill in with a few pricier flowers, such as anemones.



Be a Team Player

"We frequently entertain together, so we like to mix and match our stuff, especially if hosting a large dinner party," says Revels. "Very few people have 20 identical place settings." How to keep the mix from feeling messy? Choose one consistent MVP, like the blue-and-white Hester & Cook paper place mats they used at every seat.



Table Tip

"Use a knot fold on the napkins," says Revels. "It looks nice, and untying it gives guests something to do when they sit down."



Let the Seasonal Ingredients Shine

"We add whatever elements we're using, whether for dinner or for drinks, into our tabletop designs," says Revels of the strawberries put at each place setting. "This also brings in red, which can be a hard color to decorate with." Guests can take home their baskets of berries as fresh-picked party favors.

**EYE CONTACT**

"Put your elbow on the table with a hand up as you set it," says Revels. "If the flowers go above your wrist, seated guests won't be able to see over them."

Sneak in Conversation Starters

"Table settings are a fun place to incorporate your collections," says Vann Brock, who pulled out antique flower frogs (used for arrangements before the days of florist foam and tape) from her mother-in-law. She sprinkled them down the table for extra pops of blue and red. "Things like that spark conversation," adds Revels. "There's a story about where you found them."



Make the Bar Cart Party Central

"Have a signature cocktail so you're not constantly making various drinks," advises Revels. "Instead of throwing away any extra ingredients, set them out on the bar cart so people can add more mint, lime juice, or strawberries as they like. It also happens to look really pretty at the same time."



Have Good Clean Fun

"We wanted the children to be able to swim up and get treats," says Vann Brock of the display of ice pops. "Keep the kids and the mess in the pool." Once the sun has set, a festive sparkler station will keep the children entertained—with adult supervision, of course. **SL**



TOUCH OF CLASS

Keep linen cocktail napkins on hand for guests' drinks. "Having a really nice napkin just feels special," notes Revels.