



C'EST LA VIE
Clockwise from top left: Andrew Spurgin with models; baked abalone in its shell; a model and the spread at Oliver & Rose, where Spurgin created a fantastical fête; Louis XIV Bombe Glacée

Master of Ceremonies

An S.D. event visionary, Andrew Spurgin is reconcepting the way we party. Let them eat cake!

| By Amy Finley |
| Photography by Robert Benson |

Andrew Spurgin drives a '69 GTO. He dons candy-hued Ted Baker suits with pocket squares and his spit-shined Prada wingtips speak of a different era. Swinging London, perhaps. That would suit the British-born event architect, who is steadily transforming San Diego's social scene. On a constant quest for what's new in parties, trend-eschewing Spurgin looks to what's old. "We all want to visit the past," says Spurgin, a man who clearly dreams in color, "because we can't! But we can create an illusion. And that illusion should never be broken." Just take the recent dress rehearsal for the fundraising

gala at The New Children's Museum that he's styling in October. Held at Oliver & Rose, the private-events-only spinoff of Café Chloe downtown, Spurgin created a whimsical, Marie Antoinette-inspired scene replete with couture period gowns on Marie Antoinette models. "Andrew has this reservoir of cultural references combined with great imagination and a willingness to take risks," says Alison McGrath, co-owner of Café Chloe.

For this opulent Louis XIV fantasy, there were dripping crystal chandeliers, hand-painted "Fabergé" CONTINUED...

MAKEUP BY CHANEL; ARTIST: GEORGE GARCIA; DRESSES BY KARLY FRANZ; WIG STYLIST: GILBERT MEZA



THE NEW OLDE
Clockwise from top left: Chloe McGrath-Clute, for whom Café Chloe is named; Bala the wolfhound; "Fabergé" egg filled with Uni; the lavish tabletop setting

...CONTINUED eggs filled with uni custard and gemlike salmon roe, gilded macarons and even an Irish wolfhound (for pure whimsy) led about on a jeweled leash.

Nearby, Spurgin fiddled with a gem-encrusted carapace of a lobster, held by McGrath's daughter, Chloe, on a satin pouf. The details popped. It was a lush, romantic, deliberately off-kilter interpretation of the gala's theme Feast, tailored to induce madcap, ribald revelry—the type that loosens wallets and fattens coffers. Not for nothing is he the darling of the charity circuit.

"Andrew's mind is holographic," laughs McGrath, sipping a glass of pink Champagne. "Even for his dinner parties, he does these charming little sketches of the dishes that he's preparing."

For eight years, while their East Village gem, Café Chloe, grew in popularity and reputation, McGrath and her husband, John Clute, would look longingly across 9th Avenue at a glass-fronted 1902 brick building, a 2,500-square-foot live-work studio. It was a downtown anomaly, airy and bright, with skylights set into the rafters of the tall woodwork ceiling. It's the kind of place Clute and McGrath had dreamed of, somewhere they could imagine stretching out and hosting the parties petite Café Chloe had had to turn down over the years.

They christened the new space in December, tapping Spurgin to host an elaborate steampunk Victorian

Christmas, a spruce-draped fantasy held among the chinoiserie screens and roughened concrete floors.

There was velvet, women in corsets and feathers, and he in Escoffier regalia—neckerchief and tall toque—ladling beef consommé into porcelain bowls from a brass samovar.

"I am fascinated with history," says Spurgin, a connoisseur of highbrow/lowbrow who can ramble the names of bespoke tailors alongside hole-in-the-wall taco shops and Japanese barbecue joints. (Foodie alert: His faves are Tacos El Paisa and Convoy's Tsuruhashi.) "The fashion, the architecture, the scandals: History makes for plain good theater."

Spurgin is able to infuse intellectual sophistication into scenes that could, in lesser hands, deviate horribly into campy kitsch. Case in point: a recent street food festival for Barrio Logan's Public Market was buzzing with noodle carts, crêpe makers, chicharrones vendors, musicians, dancers, goats, chickens and the omnipresent specter of multicultural chaos.

The Chloe crew have long witnessed Spurgin's passion for entertaining. Every Thanksgiving, their families embark on annual glamping trips, where Spurgin turns his spit-roasted porchetta over the embers while French Bordeaux is poured into tin camping mugs.

"I have seen the future," he says. "The past is the future." ■

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