

Mann About Town

| LIVING WELL IN NEW YORK |



STEVE SOLOMON
GETS A BREAK

CHARLES STROUSE
KEEPS
THE BEAT

BONNIE WALKER
BRINGS OUT
THE DETAILS

FORMER MAYOR ED KOCH
LOVES NEW YORK

Bonnie Walker

The Go-To Gal

For Bonnie Walker, an event is much more than just a party. It's a wonderful story to be shared and remembered—a tale with a beginning, a middle and end. The experience of a lifetime. A dream fulfilled. A wish come true. A joyous occasion that flourishes, exceeding your every expectation.

After 25 years, this pioneer in the field of event-planning has raised her profession to an exquisite art. In her hands, Bar Mitzvahs become fundraisers for charitable causes; first-class dinner parties go from cliché to classy; destination weddings become romantic second honeymoons for every couple invited; and something as simple as a small birthday dinner at that impossible-to-get-into new restaurant blossoms into an unforgettable surprise weekend getaway to Aspen with friends.

As Bonnie sees it, "if an event is a puzzle, it's my job to put every piece together to create the perfectly finished picture. I never forget what so many event planners sometimes do: I am representing you. I have to make sure that every part of that event is going to make you shine, or is going to represent your family." When the night is over? "The guests are going to walk away not saying it was a 'Bonnie' event, but Mary's event, or the charity's event—that it was so personalized to them!"

If there is a signature of a 'Bonnie' wedding/event, it's her attention to detail—from the custom logo she designs for every occasion, to the hand-made, one-of-a-kind drapes her staff will sew in the colors or patterns a client describes, to the hand-painted dance floor at a wedding, the lighting, the ceiling treatment, the unique entertainer she found during travels in Europe, or the hand-made baskets the guests walk away with—re-

membering you every time they reach for the contents within. As she puts it, "Everything is not just fresh and creative—it's fine. Every square inch of what I do is to perfection," she says, describing how she pre-presses every crease in the napkins so they lay just right on the table. Laughing, she admits, "Maybe I'm a little too detailed, but that's my thing—and a lot has to do with my mother, who taught me everything."

Born in Washington, D.C. and raised in Bethesda, her father, Stanley, had a store called Harry's, which provided wine and liquor to players and politicians all over D.C. In fact, it was Harry's private-label champagne that was used to toast the landing on the moon.

She recalls that her mother, Clara, threw wonderful parties filled with exceptional style visions of Eames Chairs and a Paul Evans dining room table.

In those days there were maybe 10 event planners working in the whole country, and Clara Walker worked with the best. "She would drag me as a child to every meeting," Bonnie recalls. "So I was born and raised in the industry."

With a background in art that allows her to speak the language of the florists or decorators she hires—not to mention the ability to design something a client wants if it simply doesn't exist outside of their imagination—Bonnie was destined to do good work. But from the beginning, she wanted more. She wanted to do great work. And she did.

Her very first event was a fundraiser for a non-profit group that was perfectly happy to clear \$35,000 in donations from their annual party. But Bonnie wanted to kick it up a notch, so she personally staked a \$16,500 fee for the band of the moment—fresh from playing Donald Trump's New Year's Eve party. (After all, it was the go-go '80s. What could generate more free publicity than a band with a Trump connection?)

The result? The event raised \$155,000—millions by today's standards. She was thrilled (and so was the client!), which is why Bonnie now donates her time to arrange three charitable events each year completely gratis.

Bonnie currently owns leading event planning company, Bonnie Walker Events, and works out of her offices in New York City and Pittsburgh. This does not limit Bonnie's ability to plan a first-class event anywhere in the world though. Her winning style goes wherever she goes: Bonnie Walker has teams on the ground in Hawaii, Aspen and nearly every country in Europe, all ready to serve her clients' desires. And her home team? They've been together the entire 25 years of her career.

"I've never done an event the same way twice. I've never done a design twice. And that's pretty difficult!" Plus it keeps it fun for her—which means more fun for you. And whether it's dinner for 40, or a citywide celebration that draws a crowd of 40,000 (as she once gamely handled for the City of Pittsburgh), she always keeps it personal.

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Example? For a Bar (or Bat) Mitzvah, she insists on taking the child who's about to come of age out for a private get-to-know-you dinner. No parents. Just to get a feel for who they are. "If they're a little uncomfortable, I understand, but I guarantee after spending some time with me, they will think I'm cool! Children's relationships with parents are very different than their relationship with me. So it allows me to do just what the child wants while simultaneously keeping the parents happy. It works very well."

The time spent getting to know her clients can result in simple themes built around a pattern or color—like the Burberry theme that subtly tracked from the invitations to the napkins to the ties the waiters wore—even the two-dozen custom-ordered umbrellas (a must for any event. Bonnie doesn't want your guests getting wet!). Or they could be as grand as her 1998 Titanic-themed bash that made headlines around the world (and became part of a major movie)—while making a client's favorite movie come to life with shimmering blue lighting and make-believe icebergs. And when the dream calls for a stand-up show by Whoopi Goldberg, a personal serenade from Michael Bolton, or maybe a performance by hip-hop star Missy Elliot? Bonnie's the go-to gal: "As Walt Disney said, 'I like to perform miracles.'"



In fact, her events are so 'miraculous' that recently Apple Computer bought a selection of pictures from one of Bonnie's weddings to use on the software boxes, websites and in-store displays for the new iMac and iLife package.

The reason she brings life to every event is simple: Event planning is her life.

"I'm rewarded by how happy everybody is," she says. "When they're at an event, walking around with the biggest smiles, oozing with

enthusiasm and commenting to the client that they never want to leave? It's the greatest feeling in the world." **ME**

For more information on Bonnie Walker or Bonnie Walker Events, please visit www.bonniewalkerevents.com

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