



CATERING 10 Questions

Los Angeles Center Studios

*Put Your Ducks in a Row Before the Party Starts,
 And Make Sure the Valets Can Get to the Cars*

BY ANDREW HAAS-RODIE

When it comes to Los Angeles Center Studios, most people think of the film business. Which makes sense, considering that the enormous facility in City West features six 18,000-square-foot sound stages, and is

THE PERFECT EVENT

routinely filled with crews shooting films, TV shows and commercials. It has been packed with actors, directors, grips, script supervisors, best boys and other production industry folk since the day it opened.

But LACS is also often packed with diners who show up for catered events. There's an onsite restaurant, a 1,200-space underground garage, and most importantly, Director of Catering Jennifer Wachter, who is routinely working with multiple corporate groups seeking to make their event stand out. Wachter recently spoke with *Los*

Angeleno about 10 key party planning points.

Q: What are the trends in corporate catering this year?

A: I think that what a lot of people want to do is go back to not doing such themed parties, but more kind of focusing on the food and the hors d'oeuvres and the presentation.

Q: What is the key ingredient to staging a successful event?

A: You have to be organized. You really have to, as I always say, have your ducks in a row. Things can happen that are unexpected. When we did an event here for *Maxim* [the highway patrol] actually shut off the off-ramp to the freeway because there was an accident. I have no control over that. It took a little while for people to get to the studio. But the staff was there, and the right amount

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of beer that the client wanted was there. So again, you have to be organized. You have to have the right equipment, the right staffing, the correct valet company, everything has to be done, and you have got to be organized, because things can happen.

Q: What is the biggest potential problem to avoid?

A: You really have to know the guests coming to the event and sometimes you can have a security problem. Like if there's an event where you have a performance, and some people who are not invited to the party try to crash it. That is something you can run into. I've had events with rap artists, where people aren't on the list, yet they want to see Snoop.

Q: So what's it cost? How much should companies plan on spending per person?

A: It does vary depending on what the event is. Some people have spent as little as \$50 a person up to \$200. Again, it depends on the type of event. That is just the studio charges and the catering and that. That does not include the production. That is a whole separate thing.

Q: What size events do you cater?

A: As small as 300, up to 10,000.

Q: What is your specialty?

A: It's got to be when we do events here, it

is our beautiful natural backdrop, which is Downtown L.A. I had nothing to do with it, it is just our location, but when people come here they never know how beautiful Downtown L.A. is, until they get here. At night it is just completely magical. And you really do feel like you are away.

Q: What makes a good location or party venue?

A: In this city it must be easy access to people driving. They must be able to have parking either on site or nearby; it is a major issue, especially in Los Angeles. I've been to beautiful events and when I have to wait 45 minutes for my car, because the guy had to park five blocks away and is caught in traffic, I completely forget how beautiful of an evening I had. Valet is so critical to an event.

Q: Do you prefer food stations or table service?

A: I prefer food stations now, because I think everyone is kind of over being stuck at a table. I think people want to mingle and talk, especially in business you want to work the room. People sometimes are picky about what they eat. Maybe they don't eat chicken, maybe they are vegetarian and at least there is a variety of different things that people can have. People like it a lot better.

Q: How should you treat alcohol at a corporate event?

A: It depends on the policy of the corporation. I've had companies who have said they will pay a flat rate, but they want to hand out drink tickets so people can only have two drinks. Again, the company is very conscious of people driving home. Everyone is different. All of our bartenders are trained. I will cut someone off.

Q: What should every event planner never forget?

A: I think the most important thing is that when you do an event you treat it as if someone was coming to your home. To really take ownership of it, how would you feel if this was your home and you were doing the event? Of course everything would be perfect — these are guests coming to your house, so to speak. It is just to make sure that every guest feels welcomed, that there is plenty of food and drink, that the service is impeccable, because if I were having a dinner party at my house that's what I would expect. It's the same thing when I do an event for 5,000, the way I space out where the bars are, where the food station is, how much staff is coming in, where the guests are coming in, where the restrooms are, the flow. Everything has to be ideal, just like if you are having a party at your own house.

Los Angeles Center Studios is at 1201 W. Fifth St., (213) 534-3000 or lacenterstudios.com.



At Los Angeles Center Studios, Jennifer Wachter can handle parties from 300 people to 10,000. photo by Gary Lemard