

# THE ART OF THE INDOOR PICNIC

STORY BY Jane Levi

**Resist restaurants and room service and seduce her with a surprise hamper instead. Trust us**



**PICTURE THE** scene: you arrive, after dark, at the romantic location you've chosen for your perfect weekend escape. It's too late to

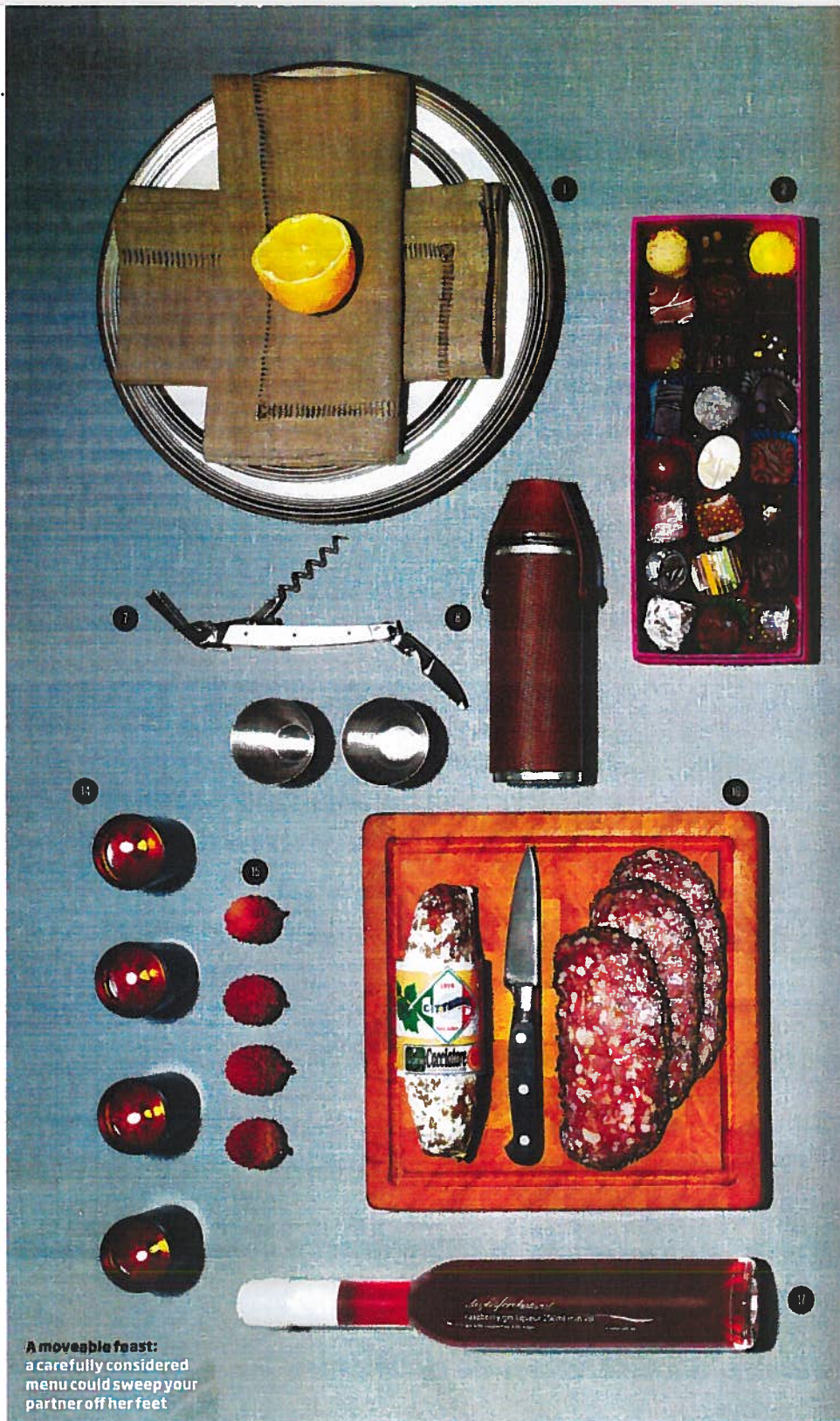
race out to the Michelin-starred restaurant in the village and besides, you've only just got here and you haven't seen each other for weeks. But you're hungry and thirsty. What to do?

If you're in a hotel, there's always room service, but no matter how many stars the kitchen holds, it always has downsides. The arrival of the trolley is just so unpredictable – it has the potential to wheel its way in at just the wrong moment. The answer? Place your "Do Not Disturb" sign firmly on the doorknob and distract your lover with a scented bath while you get to work on preparing to seduce her every sense... with a picnic.

Banish all thoughts of sandy sandwiches and screaming children: this picnic is strictly for grown-ups. If you get it right, it can be the ultimate fail-safe seduction. Trust me, I've been there. An unlikely man produced from his compact suitcase three copper plates, a folding antique fork, two tiny Georgian glasses, a set of fraying French linen napkins and brass candlesticks complete with candles, all to serve me a supper of persimmons, that day's mussels, freshly baked bread, raisins dried on the vine and perfectly chosen wine. He fed my soul and stole my heart.

One of the things your partner will love about this picnic is the evidence that you thought about her when she wasn't there. Be discerning, take her by surprise, and pay plenty of attention to the accessories. Flatter both of you with subtle lighting and create an intimate space of jewel-like colours and reflective surfaces to present her with fine food, finer drinks and a sense of you as her ideal lover.

You must come prepared: this is an opportunity to express your taste and style. Candlelight is the only acceptable ambience, so bring tea lights. Think small, and think exquisite. Everything doesn't have to match, it just needs to elegantly work together. So don't burrow in the minibar for any old glass – bring two beautiful ones of your own.



**A moveable feast:** a carefully considered menu could sweep your partner off her feet

Aim for quality, not quantity. There might be extra points awarded if you decide to round things off with a flask of her favourite malt. Whatever you choose, make it the best you can afford, and think about portability. Cans and small jars won't leak; crackers in boxes won't squash. Don't forget seasonings – it's the tiny details that count. Put sea salt and cracked pepper in tiny jars from an art store (olive oil, too). Remember that a lemon is pretty portable and a squeeze of juice may be just what's needed to enliven your plate.

Be confident enough to choose one core ingredient, pair it with a quirky side, choose a carb to serve it with, and don't look back. Try a jar of

foie gras with Melba toast and cornichons, followed by grapes and fresh lychees. Or perhaps a can of smoked oysters or mussels with oatcakes, cream cheese and kumquats, followed by whisky fudge. Maybe she'd prefer the thinnest slices of prosciutto with black figs or preserved artichokes, bread sticks dipped in olive oil, followed by chocolate truffles.

Remember, this isn't a meal, it's a sexy midnight feast. The last thing you want is to overeat. After all, you're looking for a snack that will whet the appetite, not fill you up and send you to sleep. GO

PHOTOGRAPH BY Jobe Lawrenson



## CHECK LIST

- Candles and candlesticks (and a lighter or matches)
- Linen napkins, one each, and perhaps a slightly larger one to cover the surface you want to set out your picnic on
- Knives, forks and spoons
- Up to three small (tea-size) plates – one each and one for presentation. Try metal (silver or pewter needn't be heavy to transport); wood can be beautiful and is unbreakable; or use your napkins to wrap a few china plates

- Small glasses or beakers. Antique glasses are often heavier and remarkably strong, or you can use large shot glasses for any liquid, even wine (you can be attentive with the refills). Beakers of silver or horn are almost indestructible and give a stylish nod to the basic picnic without compromising sophistication
- Sharp knife – if you're travelling abroad, FedEx it ahead
- Small board or cutting surface – this can be useful for presentation, too
- Corkscrew or suitable bottle opener

1. NAPKINS, £15 EACH. TABLECLOTH (AS BACKGROUND), £65 ALL BY VOLGA LINEN. VOLGALINEN.CO.UK. PLATE BY RALPH LAUREN, £40. RALPHLAUREN.COM. 2. TRUFFLES BY COCOMAYA, £36. COCOMAYA.CO.UK. 3. VERNA WINE GLASSES AT DAVID MELLOR, £9.50 EACH. DAVIDMELLORDESIGN.COM. 4. KUMQUATS, AT SELFRIDGES FOOD HALL. SELFRIDGES.COM. 5. PEUGEOT MIGNONETTE SALT AND PEPPER MILLS AT SUMMERILL & BISHOP, £185 EACH. SUMMERILLANDBISHOP.COM. 6. BREAD BY DAYLESFORD, £2.50. DAYLESFORDORGANIC.COM. 7. CORKSCREW BY AROUND WINE, £99. AROUNDWINE.CO.UK. 8. FLASK AND CUPS BY PURDEY, £105. PURDEY.COM. 9. ONTAKES BY WAITROSE, £1.16. WAITROSE.COM. 10. CHEESEBOARD BY PAXTON & WHITFIELD, FROM £24.50. PAXTONANDWHITFIELD.CO.UK. GRAPES, FIGS AT SELFRIDGES FOOD HALL. SELFRIDGES.COM. CAMEBERT DE NORMANDIE, £5.95. GOLDEN CENARTH, £7.25. STILTON, £17.50 PER KG. ALL AT PAXTON & WHITFIELD. PAXTONANDWHITFIELD.CO.UK. BAYWELL CHEESE BY DAYLESFORD, £4.95. DAYLESFORDORGANIC.COM. 11. DORTHWICK VINEYARD RIESLING 2008, £7.99. SIX FOOT SIX PINOT NOIR 2008, £8.80. BOTH AT ARMIT. ARMIT.CO.UK. 12. ONION PICKLE BY THE FINE CHEESE COMPANY, £2.95. FINECHEESE.CO.UK. 13. CANDIED FRUITS, £10. AT FORTNUM & MASON. FORTNUMANDMASON.COM. 14. CANDLES BY RALPH LAUREN, £15. RALPHLAUREN.COM. 15. LYCHEES, AT SELFRIDGES FOOD HALL. SELFRIDGES.COM. 16. CHOPPING BOARD, £16.75. KNIFE, £26.50. BOTH BY DAVID MELLOR. DAVIDMELLORDESIGN.COM. CACCIATORE SALAMI, £4.49. PEPPERCORN SALAMI, £2.63 FOR FIVE SLICES. BOTH AT WAITROSE. WAITROSE.CO.UK. 17. RASPBERRY GIN LIQUEUR BY DAYLESFORD, £9.95. DAYLESFORDORGANIC.COM. 18. CUTLERY BY RALPH LAUREN, £185 FOR FIVE PIECE SETTING. RALPHLAUREN.COM. 19. CELERY CRACKERS BY THE FINE CHEESE COMPANY. £2.25. FINECHEESE.CO.UK. 20. ARTICHOKE, £11.50. CORNICHONS, £4.75. NUTS, £13.95. ALL AT FORTNUM & MASON. FORTNUMANDMASON.COM.