THE ART OF THE INDOOR PICNIC

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.

Brush 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 source of light, 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 minbar for any old glass - bring two beautiful ones of your own.

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 trifles.

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.

Photograph by Jobe Lawrenson.
CANDLES AND CANDLESTICKS (AND A LIGHTER OR MATCHES)

LEMON 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 WOULDN’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 NAPKINS). BEAKERS OF SILVER OR HORN ARE ALMOST INDESTRUCTIBLE.

AND GIVE A STYLISH NOD TO THE BASIC PICNIC WITHOUT COMPROMISING SOPHISTICATION

SMART KNIFE – IF YOU’RE TRAVELLING ABROAD, PECK IT AROUND

SMALL BOARD OR CUTTING SURFACE – THIS CAN BE USEFUL FOR PRESENTATION, TOO

CORKSCREW OR WINE OPENER

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