

A grouping of Venetian-glass vases (from three inches to six feet tall) filled with tulips, roses and orchids was the head-table centerpiece at a dinner created by Dallas designer Todd Fiscus.



*how to plan*  
**AREHEARSAL  
DINNER**

*Top wedding pros share their expertise on whom to invite, what to serve and how to play nice with your future mother-in-law* **WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH JENKINS**



**LONG ISLAND BEACH**

Clockwise from above: Three-foot sparklers lit up the night at this rehearsal dinner, a clambake in Southampton organized by planner Jill Gordon. Guests sat in the sand and dined at low tables decorated with sunflowers. Fresh local lobster was served with clams, steamed corn and potatoes.

**MAKE A LIST**

NYC. planner David Tutera, who oversaw Star Jones Reynolds's nuptials, says couples have two options when deciding whom to include: either everyone or just the bridal party and immediate family (though some couples also invite out-of-town guests). Who's considered immediate family? Planners agree that the parents, grandparents and siblings of the bride and groom must be invited, but they say aunts, uncles and cousins are not automatically included. Whatever rule is

used, it should be fair. If the hosts are the groom's parents and they elect to invite members of their extended family, says Santa Barbara event designer Scott Corridan, the bride's family should be able to include the same members from their side.

**PICK A THEME**

Consider using the location or your heritage to develop a theme for your rehearsal dinner. "We do lots of New England-style clambakes and lobster bakes," says Dover, N.H., planner Kate Parker. "Everyone puts on bibs, and

all the pressure is gone with the first lobster tail. Clambakes bring down people's guards," Kim Oliff says. "We planned an Italian night with accordion players and singing waiters, and food was passed around family-style."

**INVITE THE OFFICIANT**

Many planners recommend asking the person who is marrying you, such as your rabbi or priest, to attend. "Seven or eight times out of 10, he or she will decline," says Laurie Arons, who planned the wedding of Christy Turlington and Ed Burns, "but it's a nice

"A rehearsal dinner allows guests to bond before the ceremony."

—Scott Corridan

