



ATLANTA'S SWAN HOUSE BALL

BY ALEX HITZ



THERE'S AN ULTIMATE SEASON for everything: New York in autumn, Europe in June...in Atlanta, it's the spring. Heralded by obscene sprays of pink dogwoods, hydrangeas, and azaleas, April welcomes the crown jewel of the South's social season, The Swan House Ball, a benefit for the Atlanta History Center.

I was asked to design it and cook for it a couple of years ago. It's a black-tie dinner-dance for 500 guests at The Swan House, the iconic Italianate masterpiece commissioned by a prosperous cotton broker and his wife, Emily and Edward Inman. Prix de Rome-winning classicist architect Philip Shutze designed it in 1928, and today it houses the Atlanta History Center and is open to the public for tours. That year's ball, "An Evening at Mrs. Inman's, 1928," honored Atlanta mayor Kasim Reid and Georgia governor Nathan Deal. I was flattered because my late mother, Caroline Shaw, had been instrumental in the formation and vision of the charity for more than 40 years, and I had attended the glamorous party many times. I just couldn't wait to get my hands on it.

I bought 750 yards of green and white linen Toile de Jouy—very much in vogue in 1920s decorating, and a perfect element, I thought, for a spring garden dinner in the South. I draped it over everything that didn't move, and sent out to the ecclesiastical supply house for candles tall enough that even religious zealots would bless. Nothing would

do but an order for more than 3,000 Versilia roses, and then we filled in with other pale-colored strains. White hemstitched linen lapkins, 26-inches square and hand-embroidered and monogrammed, were commissioned—from China, honey, as this was for charity—and retro-chic flatware and crystal were rented. Dinner? Creamed Shrimp with Country Ham, Chicken Pot Pie, and Lemon Ice Box Cake. Home cooking, if you please. Handmade chocolates from See's Candies and passed white-cake petit fours with pale pink roses and hard icing completed the “no theme” theme: my take on a spring evening at home in Atlanta in 1928.

Thanks to Beverly Bremer Silver

Shop—Atlanta’s treasure trove for all things sterling since 1976—and my generous friend Mimi Bremer Woodruff, I borrowed more than \$1,500,000 worth of gleaming antique sterling-silver epergnes, tureens, wine coolers, and champagne buckets to use as centerpieces. Each table was different, and truly spectacular. Sometimes, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the first impression in that ballroom—the twinkling pale pink lights, the candles, the roses, that silver—was, as they might say in Atlanta, “something to behold, indeed.” Even Mrs. Inman would have been happy, especially so, I think, as the charity raised a record amount of money that year.

Without the patience and talent of Mary Hataway, Kate Sasnett, and the staff at Soiree Catering and Events—always such fun for me to work with as incredible Mary and I were partners in a restaurant years ago and ALL my recipes are ALWAYS tested in their kitchens—flower guru John Grady Burns, Marina from Atlanta’s Event Drapery, and teams of house staff, waiters, and bartenders, none of the glory of that evening would have been possible. The whole thing, a homecoming for me, was especially touching because of my family’s generational connection to the Swan House and the Atlanta History Center. I felt so honored that they’d asked me to create such a special evening. ♦

