



WATER MILL PARTY

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Featured Expert:
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Water Mill Party, a party rental business in Water Mill, NY, specializes in products and props for high-end Hamptons events—many of which are charity fundraisers.

Owner Christine Merser offers budget-friendly party ideas that can be useful if you're on the event committee for a huge fundraising gala—or planning a business event.

Smart money-saver

Let the calendar help: "Have your party on Sunday, rather than Saturday, and the venue will cost less," says Merser. "In the Hamptons, everyone is busiest from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Generally, vendors don't give discounts during this time.

"Wherever you live, and whatever the occasion, plan your event for an off-season time. That's the best way to save money."

Save on décor

Use what your vendor has on hand: Some event planners want super-dazzling custom table linens, ceiling fabrics, or special props. "We tell organizations that if we can use products that we already have, rather than having to add to our inventory, we can give them a better price per person."

Save on table décor: Lighting can add drama to flowers, and provide big effect for little cost. Used generously, candles also provide an inexpensive "Wow" effect.

Flower tip: For gorgeous cost savings, create flower arrangements so that each table's flowers look slightly different, but with a common theme, such as color or shape.

Buy in quantity: "If flowers aren't flown in from Holland, of course there's less expense," says Merser. Moreover, she notes, vases and containers can be more expensive than flowers. "Buy containers with a common theme on eBay or at craft-oriented sites and you can save a bundle," she says.

Food with flair

Food stations are great: "People like to nibble and nibbling is less expensive than serving sit-down meals," says Merser.

"Stations call for fewer servers, which means less cost," she says. "Stations also let caterers do more preparation before the event," which lowers a number of costs, including costs for on-site equipment and labor.

Lower-cost beverages: Merser says she has noticed a big change in beverage service. "There are rarely open-bars now," she says. "Financially, signature drinks and wine are the way to go."

Small cake for show: For any event that calls for a special cake, "have a small cake to show guests, and order a larger, less expensive sheet cake for dessert service. ●