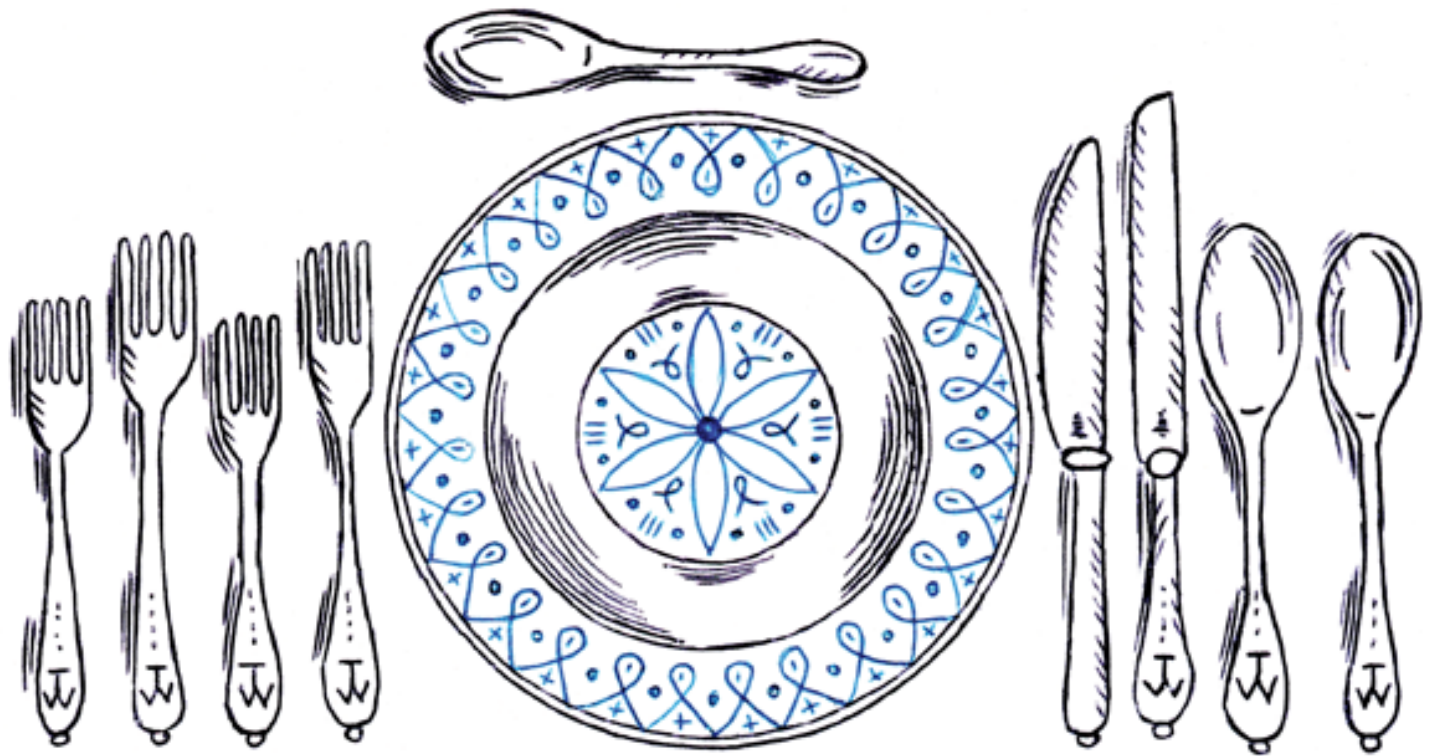


“Proper dinner etiquette goes well beyond knowing that one has to use cutlery from the outside-in or knowing which glasses to use for each wine”



Upper crust

If you remember just one thing about this paper on dining etiquette, let it be this: never, ever upstage anyone. Even if you know that what they're doing is incorrect or terribly impolite, etiquette demands that you always remain gracious. “Whatever you may have been told, etiquette is first and foremost about making people feel at ease,” says Brussels etiquette coach Melody Kissoon. In the intricate dance of the high-society dinner party, where menus are strategically chosen, seating plans carefully arranged and the company deliberately selected to ensure an optimum match, both host and guest have distinct roles to play and strict rules to adhere to. “The most important role of the host or hostess is to make guests feel relaxed and comfortable by being gracious, calm, confident and knowledgeable. As guest, on the other hand, it is important that you have the poise and skill necessary to navigate the scene and handle any kind of situation that may arise,” adds Kissoon. Understanding the basic rules of dining etiquette is mandatory. Being appropriately dressed, knowing the difference between a white wine and red wine glass or knowing on which side of your plate the side plate is located, are basic prerequisites to being a polite host or guest. “But in

high-society circles, proper dining etiquette goes much further,” says Kissoon. “Few people, for example, are aware of the difference between the British seating etiquette, which places the host and hostess at the long ends of the table, and French seating etiquette, which has the host and hostess opposite each other in the middle of the table.” Understanding seating hierarchy also helps clarify who's-who at the table. “The host will always have the most important female guest on his right, while the hostess will seat the most important male guest on her right. There are strict rules as to who sits where at the table and it would be extremely embarrassing if you had to be asked to move, both for you and your hostess,” adds Kissoon. “Also remember: the hostess always governs the table, not the host. When it comes to eating and drinking politely, proper dinner etiquette goes well beyond knowing that one has to use cutlery from the outside-in or knowing which glasses to use for each wine. One of the biggest faux pas guests can make is beginning to eat before the hostess,” adds Kissoon. Finishing a meal in style is equally important. “At the end of a meal, it is polite to place your knife and fork together in the centre of the plate vertically, with the tines of the fork pointing up and the blade of the knife to the centre towards the fork,” which is the British way of indicating that you have finished your meal. Of course in

other cultures there are other ways of doing so.” And what of the napkin? “It is always placed on the left side of one's plate, but never refolded,” Kissoon points out. After dinner, as guests relax and the night swoons to an end, collars are loosened, laughter rises boisterously and a flirtatious hand is placed on a nearby arm. What is the perfect hostess to do with rowdy guests or inappropriate situations? “She has to be the one to politely and surreptitiously explain the problem to the guest, or if necessary ask them to leave, and all without other guests noticing anything is amiss. Host or guest, in high-society we expect people to have grace, dignity and elegance, whatever the situation,” Kissoon smiles modestly. (SC)