

# BUFFET MARVELLOUS

Text Alexandra Kohut-Cole Photography Michael Tan

**PLANNING FOR A BUFFET PARTY ON THE TERRACE, FOR UP TO EIGHTY PEOPLE, ON A MONTHLY BASIS IS NO MEAN FEAT. MARY ANN MENDIS REVEALS SOME OF HER SECRETS.**

Mary Ann Mendis with daughter Lauryn. On the table is a simple setting of white table cloth, handmade Turkish napkins designed by Mendis, Christofle silverware, Villeroy and Bosch crockery and Waterford tumblers

From behind an architectural dream of glass, timber and lush greenery, former Miss Singapore winner Mary Ann Mendis welcomes guests into her home situated in the Newton area, often with her cherubic nineteen-month-old daughter, Lauryn, in arms. Kemi and Lulu, the King Charles spaniel and the poodle, too, will noisily yap and jump before going all sappy and lapping up attention from their unknown visitors.

Mendis has been cooking seriously and throwing buffet parties since she married her businessman husband, Steve, in 2004. Her culinary passion came from her need to feed the family and she willingly concedes she is self-taught. Mendis says, "I experiment and read good cook books, and have discovered during cooking classes that chefs don't always want to share their trade secrets!"

Her kitchen is large and welcoming with both dry and wet kitchens and no less than three large fridges—as one might expect from a person so passionate about food and entertaining. "Three fridges are not enough—I'm thinking of buying a fourth one!" says Mendis, who admits that she would really love a walk-in fridge but it would need to have been included as part of the original architecture.

On average, Mendis entertains once a month for numbers anywhere from between 40 to 60. These are usually buffet affairs held on the picturesque terrace. This alfresco setting is stunning with a clear view over houses with plenty of trees and high rises in the background. A gentle waterfall and designer pond sit above a sloping flower garden, the domain of the family bullmastiff.

Mendis explains that entertaining, particularly on a large scale, all comes down to meticulous planning. She buys her ingredients from the wet market and from specialist wholesalers. She inspects all the ingredients herself thoroughly, especially to check on the marbling of meats, before purchase. She says, "You need good ingredients—I have regular suppliers as I need very fresh produce because I can't collect on the day of a party."

The Mendis cooking hallmark is clearly one of spontaneous abandon. "I don't watch the calories when cooking, be it full cream or butter—I can dump it all in!"

Experimenting with new dishes, particularly Western, is a favourite hobby of Mendis; she will happily produce dishes for her parties that she has never before made. For her husband's recent birthday party, she cooked a 6-kilogramme salmon, roast pork, beef stew, a chicken, roast potatoes, marinated mussels, steamed prawns, hors d'oeuvres, and many other dishes. Pudding was, deliberately easy on the stomach, fresh fruit and a big chocolate cake. She always ends up with a lot of food so gives her guests 'doggy bags' at the end of a party. "I don't want to eat my party food for the next few days—I do all the cooking but don't like the eating!" Mendis doesn't necessarily set a theme for her parties, but always decorates with plenty of fresh flowers and personally creates the invitation cards. Alas, she says, "People love food and fail to notice everything else." ❖