

# How to party like the 1% club

From a ‘maze’ of 45,000 roses to customised tablescapes and monogrammed guest gifts, elite event planners are entrusted to make multimillion-pound celebrations out of this world, says *Olivia Lidbury*

If your idea of Christmas stress is securing an Ocado delivery slot, spare a thought for the party planners of the 1% club, whose job it is to organise the multimillion-pound celebrations of the impossibly rich.

The pre-Christmas rush has already started for Louisa Preskett Mobbs, co-founder of luxury tableware brand Maison Margaux. There is a steady stream of orders for hand-painted plates, monogrammed napkins with matching seat pads and hand-finished lampshades.

‘Every Christmas we work with a family to create customised tablescapes to take them from Christmas Eve through to New Year’s Day. Each day and night there is a celebration and a meal

that requires a different setting,’ says Preskett Mobbs. It can take a seamstress four hours to embroider each napkin: multiply 50 guests by a dozen events and you get the picture. In the age of Instagram, everything is in the detail, for which the wealthy are prepared to pay eye-watering amounts.

Larry Walshe, a London-based event designer known for his extraordinary floral installations, reckons he hasn’t worked on a wedding in 2025 that cost less than £1 million. ‘People ask: “How could someone possibly spend that much?” But it’s easy when you’re used to living to a completely different standard. If you’re drinking from Baccarat crystal at home and want to continue that experience for your

guests, you could easily spend £90,000 on glassware alone. If you take an uncompromising approach to every item, it gets very expensive very quickly.’

Walshe’s favourite concept this year was erecting a ‘maze’ for a wedding ceremony at Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Antibes, composed of hedges of white

roses. The bride weaved her way through one side, the groom the other, and they met in the middle on a podium to symbolise their union. The labyrinth took 320 hours and 45,000 roses to create, yet the ceremony lasted just seven minutes, the shortest in Walshe’s years in the business – and he’s had his share of

unusual requests, such as that of the bride whose flowers weren’t ‘white enough’. His team spent days dip-dyeing each one – yellow stamens included.

Wealth means not having to take ‘no’ for an answer. Party planner Mark Niemierko, the man behind James and Julia Corden’s 2012 wedding at Babington

House, has been known to ‘bump-out’ hotels – covering the cost of rescheduling pre-booked guests when wanting a venue exclusively. He once had to redecorate the Christmas display inside a London museum when it didn’t align with the aesthetic of a client’s wedding. The staircase, which merely served as the entrance, and the gallery space, where guests mingled for 90 minutes post-ceremony, were temporarily made over. ‘We paid five figures to have decorations and flowers removed, then reinstalled afterwards,’ he says.

Rachel Birthistle, AKA the Lake Como Wedding Planner, is the woman you call to make your dreams come true. The Irish-born, Italy-based creative recently masterminded the wedding of YouTube star Logan Paul to Danish model Nina Agdal in front of 275 guests. The couple secured private use of luxury hotel Villa d’Este and its 151 rooms over a three-day extravaganza that included a welcome dinner, fireworks display and pool party on Italy’s most picturesque lake. The bride wore two custom-made designer dresses and the event is rumoured to have cost \$10 million.

This summer Birthistle was entrusted by George and Amal Clooney to design a series of private gatherings for The Clooney Foundation For Justice around Lake Como. Guests were

tablescapers, entertainers, florists, specialist painters and caterers.

As Sarah Haywood, a British event producer name-checked by US Vogue as one of the world’s most esteemed wedding planners, says, ‘They’re not like normal weddings – they’re like movie productions.’ She curates events for the ultra-high-net-worth set. Each one takes months of planning and could range from a three-day birthday celebration starting on The Royal Scotsman train and culminating in a party in a castle, to week-long weddings. Her clients often own several homes around the world and travel by private jet. ‘When they say, “It’s my 60th

and just think, “Oh that’s nice, they put some dining tables in there”,’ she says.

Video projections, drone shows, acrobats, celebrity singers and superstar DJs in landmark venues are ‘kind of a given at this level’, says Haywood. But there’s only one chance to get it right. When clients of Caper & Berry (which recently catered pop star Mabel’s wedding reception at London’s V&A) wanted to recreate menus from their favourite restaurants in France, several of the company’s head chefs were flown there ‘to experience and understand the concept exactly’, says Managing Director Tim Brennan.

Then there’s guest gifting – a whole new level of expense. ‘The magic ingredient is how you take care of people,’ says Haywood, who notes that the families she works for can be ‘very unforgiving’. Gifting can make attendees feel even more valued: for the party aboard The Royal Scotsman, Haywood commissioned monogrammed pyjamas and Harris Tweed washbags filled with sustainably sourced toiletries. Birthistle will ask silk weavers in Lake Como to make scarves based on her designs as welcome gifts. Niemierko

is currently into engraved matchbox sleeves and coasters. He once sent out hundreds of refillable leather notebook covers from Smythson customised with invitations and subtle embossing.

Taking care of logistics can help with the mental load of being a guest, says Niemierko. He loves a ‘leave your wallet at home’ policy, where guests simply RSVP and pack. ‘We pick you up, put you in a hotel and get you home.’ (The car bill alone can reach £50,000, he says.)

And if you’ve had a lovely time, then do make it known. ‘Don’t forget a thank-you note. I send them to every team member after an event,’ says Niemierko. ‘But I’m extreme – I’ll even send one to the plumber.’



## ‘FOR ONE BIG WEDDING, WE HAD TO BUILD A STAFF VILLAGE A MONTH BEFORE’

treated to acupuncture sessions, immaculately tablescaped meals with bespoke linens, and candlelit dinners in historic venues including the Teatro Sociale.

It takes hundreds of people to bring every detail to life. ‘For a big wedding we did in Paris, we had to build a staff village a month before with a canteen, such was the scale of the build,’ says Birthistle. Sharing a glimpse into this monied world via her Instagram @rachelbirthistle, the accompanying captions thank videographers, drone pilots,

birthday”, we have to deliver something that is more extraordinary than their everyday – and that is hard,’ she says.

‘If you’ve got the budget, you can go crazy,’ says Haywood. A recent wedding for a couple in the art world involved securing Villa Adriana, a Unesco heritage site near Rome. A specialist team of scenic designers and decorative painters were drafted to reproduce the exact flooring and mosaics over the protected originals. The process took weeks. ‘Yet you look at a photo



A RECENT ‘END OF SEASON’ PARTY FOR GUESTS AT THE LANESBOROUGH LONDON, WITH TABLEWARE FROM MAISON MARGAUX. FLOWERS BY LUCY VAIL FLORISTRY

HOLLY CLARK, GREG FINCK, @RACHELBIRTHISTLE/INSTAGRAM