

NORWICH NOTES

A summer getaway to a friend's place in the country can be a social minefield. William Norwich gets happy-houseguest advice from the experts.

who: SALLY ALBEMARLE
(WITH HUSBAND RUFUS)
wore: VALENTINO

the weekenders

Parties are a lot like surfing. You ride the waves and see where you go, wading in the waters, floating in some glamorous din, talking about. . . . Well, one particular night not long ago, talking about houseguests and house presents.

Salad tongs had been suggested as the best houseguest presents. **Nathalie Leeds Leventhaw**, in J. Mendel silk and ermine, and the Lehman Brothers financier and It-girl-around-town **Lil Phillips**, in Oscar de la Renta lacy black, pondered this present possibility. We were a few hundred deep at a fund-raiser organized by the Friends of New Yorkers for Children, convened in the ballroom of the Mandarin Oriental hotel in the Time Warner Center.

With an abundance of white flowers on long picnic-style tables painted deep gold, the party was decorated by **Raul Avila**, delighting Manhattan's young socials here on a Friday night after a spell of other parties, gallery openings, and benefits. There was artist **Rachel Feinstein**'s opening downtown, the commencement of **Martha Graham**'s season at City Center, and **Linda Fairstein**'s literary luncheon for God's Love We Deliver; there was a rowdy Dressed to Kilt party put on by the Friends of Scotland. But this, the New Yorkers for Children Event, was the dressiest party of the lot. **Dayssi Olarte de Kanavos**, **Renee Rockefeller**, **Susan Shin**, **Vanessa von Bismarck**, and

Stephanie Winston Wolkoff were the co-chairs.

Clearly, the social set loves its city life . . . but come summer, like dancers in some kind of waltz, hosts and guests line up parallel and launch themselves to assorted weekend retreats. Ah, the agonies and the ecstasies of summer visiting.

"And what does a girl bring a man when he's her host for the weekend?" Lil Phillips asked.

"Bring champagne and wine, but it is suggestive. If you want to deflect the romantic pressure, bring a board game. Or an action film, or a movie about sports that you, even if you are pretending, are only too happy to watch," suggested rain-maker **Peggy Siegal** when she heard Lil's question.

One delicate subject that always comes up when weekend house parties are discussed, is the problem of becoming unwilling witness to discord among other couples sharing the same roof. What do you do if your hosts go to war with each other? Go for a walk, go to the gym or hairdresser, get out of the house. If one or both of your hosts *talking fashion* >80



THE NEW YORKERS FOR CHILDREN BENEFIT DREW THE CITY'S BRIGHTEST LIGHTS.

who: OLIVIA CHANTECAILLE
wore: ALVIN VALLEY

who: DAYSSI OLARTE DE KANAVOS (CENTER) AND RENEE ROCKEFELLER
wore: NAEEM KAHN (CENTER) AND A CHANEL TOP

try to discuss their problem with you, don't, unless you really are best friends. Explain that just as you know that Nantucket's morning glories will bloom tomorrow, you know they will be back together; you would hate to be in the middle of the blossoms.

If, as hosts, you find your guests behaving like a two-character road show of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, do as readers of the "Dear Mary" column in the British *Spectator* were recently advised: "Keep in stock a number of scripts which can be photocopied and used for domestic play-reading entertainment. . . . You will find that all manner of personal upsets can be channeled to cathartic release through the medium of play-reading in a private home."

If you come down to breakfast on Sunday morning and see your hosts, or guests, splashed across the newspapers accused of some transgression, do not press for details. Just sip your coffee, shake your head, and say, "The press, such awful people. They hounded Jackie all the days of her life."

From a combined dispatch, more advice from seasoned houseguests.

"If your weekend away begins on your hosts' jet or helicopter, be on time. But when motoring on your own, try never to arrive too early or too late," said **Rufus Albemarle**. "And do not spread evangelism if at all possible." In other words, hold the Kabbalah.

Ask before you light up cigars, cigarettes, or any other smoking material, for that matter. Avoid cell yell and leave ringers off. Wall Street may end in Southampton, but do not tie up your hosts' phone lines with your computer.

Keep things jolly for your hosts. If they are having guests for lunch or dinner, people you may not know, think of at least ten questions you can ask a stranger politely. If you are card players, pay up nightly (in cash) or certainly by the morning you are leaving.

If you like to cook, offer, as **Karolina Kurkova** will, to make your specialty; hers is potato pancakes. (Models eat.) If your hosts have children, ask the parents for a play date with them on Sunday

morning to give your hosts, and the nanny if there is one, some downtime. Take the children shopping in the village for a book, a toy, a sweet; take them to the car wash. Kids love car washes.

Call in advance and ask your hosts what you will want to wear. If they say "informal," ask them to define that clearly. **Mercedes Bass's** informal and **Queen Latifah's** informal are two very different things. Do not borrow your hosts' clothes or jewelry. Well, a slicker in a hurricane, but that is it. And forget tracksuits; it is a sign of respect to dress up for your host. If your hostess's husband has a wandering eye, do not wear a skimpy bathing suit to the pool or on the boat, nor an abandoned décolletage in the evening.

Also, know your place and stay there. "Knock before you enter any room, any

who: ARTIST RACHEL FEINSTEIN.
DESIGNER MARC JACOBS (BELOW LEFT)
wore: MARC JACOBS
what: FEINSTEIN'S OPENING AT
THE MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY, NYC



room," **Lauren Davis** said, remembering something.

Ask your host if it is OK to tip the help, and be prepared to. If you are not rolling in dough—perhaps you are in the arts, and I do not mean a collector—a good guide is about \$100 to the majordomo for a weekend of assistance; \$50 to the cook; \$50 to the person who did your laundry. Billionaires, meanwhile, should leave trust funds. Household help or no household help, a gentleman always leaves a clean bathroom after he shaves and showers;

so, too, a lady brings cosmetic pads and towelettes to make sure all her makeup is removed before she lays her head on her hosts' Porthault linen.

As for the matter of house presents, why not bring one-size-fits-all clothing, like djellabas and straw hats, or beach towels? So many people have these big-screen entertainment centers, but rarely do they have film libraries; why not buy a boxed set of great films or amusing TV shows? If you are feeling extravagant, buy the American Film Institute's set of the 100 most important films.

Last but not least, there is the matter of your departure.

Social life, like show biz, is all about timing. To quote a truism that has been attributed to many thinkers, from Samuel Johnson to Benjamin Franklin, but perhaps sounds best in "old Spanish proverb" form: *El huésped y el pescado a los tres días hiede*. (Any guest, like any fish, is bound to be objectionable on the third day.) □

HOUSE GIFTS

ideas for the host



Bring a pair of Martimekko beach towels.

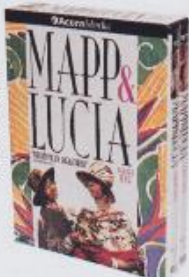


How about a beach cover-up? Mayle, about \$465.



May we suggest salad tongs? Michael Aram Botanical tongs, about \$65.

DVDs from the BBC are fun. Mapp & Lucia set, about \$36.



CHIC COMFORTS

ideas for the guest



Summer roses for their room.



Teuscher truffles, about \$32.



Pretty soaps from Mistral, about \$6.50 each.



Hang a vintage kimono on the back of the door.