

IT ALL STARTED OVER LUNCH

David Monn sets the perfect summer table. By Madhuri Vijay

ASK ANYONE ELSE TO CREATE THE perfect outdoor lunch setting, and you get a pretty picture. Ask event and lifestyle designer David Monn, and you get an experience as intimate as memory. “Tables are living things,” Monn says with conviction. “Every component is part of the experience.”

It is one of those midsummer afternoons that seem to exist outside of time. A table waits in the shade of a tree, covered in smooth linen burlap.

Nothing moves except a breeze ruffling the leaves overhead.

Then, with the seeming effortless magic of the best theater, the table is transformed. Flowers twist up from vases. Pale, translucent oysters gleam beside jewel-tone cups. A ruddy lobster rests on its bed of bright lemons, natural inhabitant of this surreal, colorful landscape. Behind it all, there is a sense of purpose, a sense that each detail—each bowl and fork and flower—is meant for real people, whose lives now begin to take shape before us.

A woman, lost in conversation, absentmindedly drops flower petals into her half-empty glass. A man cracks a lobster shell; the cool brine of oysters is at the back of his throat. We know these people.

Anyone else would have ended it there. But Monn adds a third act to the story: Now the tablecloth is ruffled, the meal is a memory, the guests are gone. But traces linger. Most tantalizing of all, an iPhone is left in the folds of a lipstick-kissed napkin, a powerful reminder that what happened here, no matter how brief, was nothing less than life. ♦



*Photographs by
Robin Broadbent*



Nouvel Studios Twisted tumblers (from \$24) and Orion bowls (from \$26); available at barneys.com.
Tina Frey Designs baguette dish, \$60; tinafreydesigns.com.

Chiarastella Cattana napkins, from \$21; chiarastellacattana.it. Sabre Natura flatware in orange, from \$15; sabre.fr.
Arrangements of sweet peas, ranunculus and poppies from Manhattan's 28th Street floral markets.

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Contributing editor David Monn is a New York-based event and party planner. For details, see davidmonn.com.