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Partying green in tough times

While the days of excess seem to be over, a party in New York last week showed that it's always in vogue (and on budget) to be green.

By *E.B. Solomont*

Tue, Mar 31 2009 at 6:55 AM EST

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AUTHOR IN RESIDENCE: MNN columnist Josh Dorfman signs copy of his new book 'The Lazy Environmentalist on a Budget'. (All photos courtesy [Ron Holtz Photography](#))

"I think it's a misnomer that when you're doing something green, the sweater is going to be itchy or the food is going to taste bland," says Celia Chen, a New York City party planner. "Well, that's not true anymore."

Chen — who is editor-in-chief of [Notes on a Party](#), an online entertaining magazine — is explaining the concept behind her "Eco Chic" parties, green soirees thrown to showcase the idea and the vendors behind parties that are both stylish and sustainable. A veteran party planner, Chen says big bashes typically leave monster-sized carbon footprints. "You're having a lot of food and drink; a lot gets thrown away; you're doing gift bags with tissue," she said. "There's got to be a way to do this green," she recalls thinking about a year ago.

Turns out, there is.

Last year, Chen threw "A Night of Eco-Chic Entertaining," and followed it up with two other parties, including one last Wednesday night to celebrate the launch of *The Lazy Environmentalist on a Budget*, Josh Dorfman's follow-up book to *The Lazy Environmentalist: Your Guide to Easy, Stylish, Green Living*. (The original *Lazy Environmentalist* book was so popular that it spawned a syndicated radio show on Sirius Satellite from 2006 to 2008, and now Dorfman writes a [weekly column for MNN](#) and currently is filming aspects of the book for a [TV show on the Sundance Channel](#).)

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The invitations were digital, not paper. Guests were invited to bring recyclables. Inside the Manhattan event space, the walls were washed with green lights courtesy of a lighting firm that incorporates LEDs and low consumption fluorescents. The bar was stocked with all-natural mixers; organic beer; wine from a sustainable vineyard; and organic vodka. Hors d'oeuvres -- served on biodegradable plates, some made from pressed palm leaves -- were cooked with local ingredients.

"It's *real* food, I think," says Philip Winser, who partnered last year with childhood friend, Chef Benjamin Towill, to launch a catering company, [Silkstone Bespoke Events](#), which produces catering in an "environmentally friendly and sustainable way." He points to a table with caramelized banana pavlova, toffee lady apples, cumin roasted carrots and more. "The carrots are roasted, that's all they are," he says. "Everyone should be eating like this," he says. "The days of excess seem to be over. This kind of food ties into that."

Other details -- such as rental furniture from a sustainable furniture company, and soy wax candles instead of paraffin votives -- were incorporated by Danielle Venokur, who helped produce and design the March 25 event and the earlier Eco-Chic parties from a sustainable perspective. (Venokur, founder of [dvGreen](#), a sustainable party and event planner, hosts MNN's [Green Party](#) video series.)

At the party, Venokur showcased a table lined with Dorfman's book that also incorporated sustainable kitchen items and locally-grown plants. "I'm happy to say the visual impact was big while the footprint remained small," she told us later.

Later, Dorfman praised Chen's work, and delved into the concept behind his book, which, like her party, focuses on choosing eco-friendly items and integrating them into everyday life.

Dorfman says his sophomore literary effort addresses a common complaint, that "green is too expensive." The book offers specific, budget-friendly advice, as well as tips for gadgets that incorporate sustainability into everyday life. Among them is one of Dorfman's personal favorites: a [low-flow showerhead](#). "It's just responding to consumer behavior," he says. "It's one of the smartest products I've seen."

WATCH AND WIN
LIMITED EDITION CAPTAIN PLANET T-SHIRT
SIGNED BY CREATOR, TED TURNER

An illustration of Captain Planet, a superhero with blue skin, a red cape, and a yellow globe on his chest, pointing his right hand. Next to him is a white t-shirt with a circular graphic that says "BY OUR POWERS COMBINED" and features the five elements of Earth. Below the illustration is the text "TAKE THE QUIZ NOW!"



Dorfman says he offers advice to meet people halfway. "People need clothing, people need dishwashers, a lot of people need a car to get around. So given the reality that we buy stuff, how do you make those purchases, how do you reduce the impact of those purchases on the planet?" he said. He emphasizes that there are always choices that can benefit the planet.

At the party, a who's who of green New York City echoed his sentiment. "I think it's a great concept because it's so important to bring 'eco' to the mainstream," said Tiffany Threadgould, a Brooklyn-based designer who retools discarded objects into usable items like lamps and tables. Through her business, [RePlayGround](#), based in Brooklyn, Threadgould says, "I'm trying to show people that after it's first life, things can have a second life."

Jasmin Chua, a writer for Tree Hugger, said green is becoming more accessible to everyone and certain industries -- like fashion and beauty -- have tapped into the demand. "The more you learn, the more you want to do something and the more you do something, the more it becomes a fundamental part of who you are as a person," she said.

For Chen, "Eco Chic" is a way to show others it is possible to incorporate key green details -- whether it's donating extra food to a pantry, composting after the party, or decorating with potted plants instead of cut flowers. "The message," she said, "is really, 'You can always do it a little more green.'"



Several vendors showcased their wares at "A Night of Eco-Chic Entertaining" in New York City on March 25:

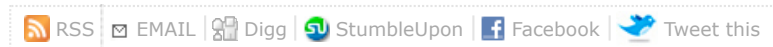
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Ever wanted to know how to throw an eco-friendly shindig for you and your friends? Watch our "Green Party" webisodes for ideas and tips.

(YouTube video above by Brit Liggett courtesy of www.lazyenvironmentalist.com)



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COMMENTS

● Posted By Anonymous - Mon, Mar 30 2009 at 5:48 AM EST

[Going Green](#)

Hey everyone,

I saw the article about being greener and more economically friendly which is great. I think it is great that more people are aware of the fact that the planet is in trouble and that we need to act now in order to help out. I think we can all do that little bit extra to try and help save the planet. Whether that be the little things, such as making sure all water taps are properly turned off when you leave the kitchen or bathroom, switching all your electrical appliances off instead of standby. I do all these, but I have also changed the way I send greetings cards. The amount of paper birthday cards, and Christmas cards we send every I was shocked to think at how much money I was spending, and the amount of resources I was using. To change my ways, I have now become a bit of a fan of e-Cards. I think they are such a good way to help the environment, no paper required, so less trees to be cut down! This has to be a good thing! I have done my research and I have finally come across a really good [Environmentally Friendly](#) e-Card site. One of the things I like about this site is it is so easy to use, I am not that confident with using computers so this site was really good for me, everything was easy to use and the instructions were easy to follow. Another great thing about this site is that it is totally free, this makes me very happy, saves pennies!! I know e-Cards are not going to be for everyone, but I think they are worth a try! Hope you all find this useful, Kind regards, Nicole.

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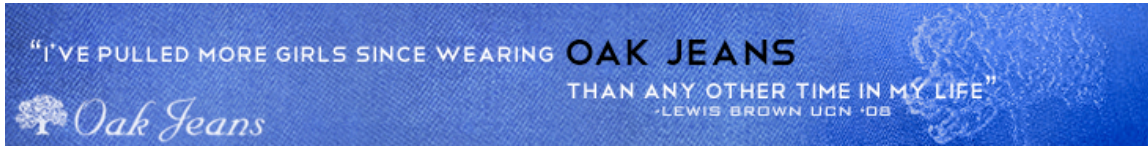
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