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# Party Room

AN OLD CARRIAGE HOUSE IS REWORKED INTO A DESTINATION FOR FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND GREAT FOOD

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY TYLLIE BARBOSA

A “take-out” approach to entertaining has nothing to do with fast-food meals wrapped in paper at the home of Chicago designer Frank Ponterio and his wife, Becky. When this couple hosts an intimate dinner, there’s a good chance it won’t be in the dining room of their 1920s suburban home, designed by prolific architect David Adler. Instead, the meal is often taken out to a separate structure they call the “Pour Room.” Just steps from their back door, the Pour Room was originally the

## Rustic Wonders

Pick one intentionally mismatched element such as this vintage flatware. “The beauty of vintage pieces is in their imperfections,” says designer Frank Ponterio.



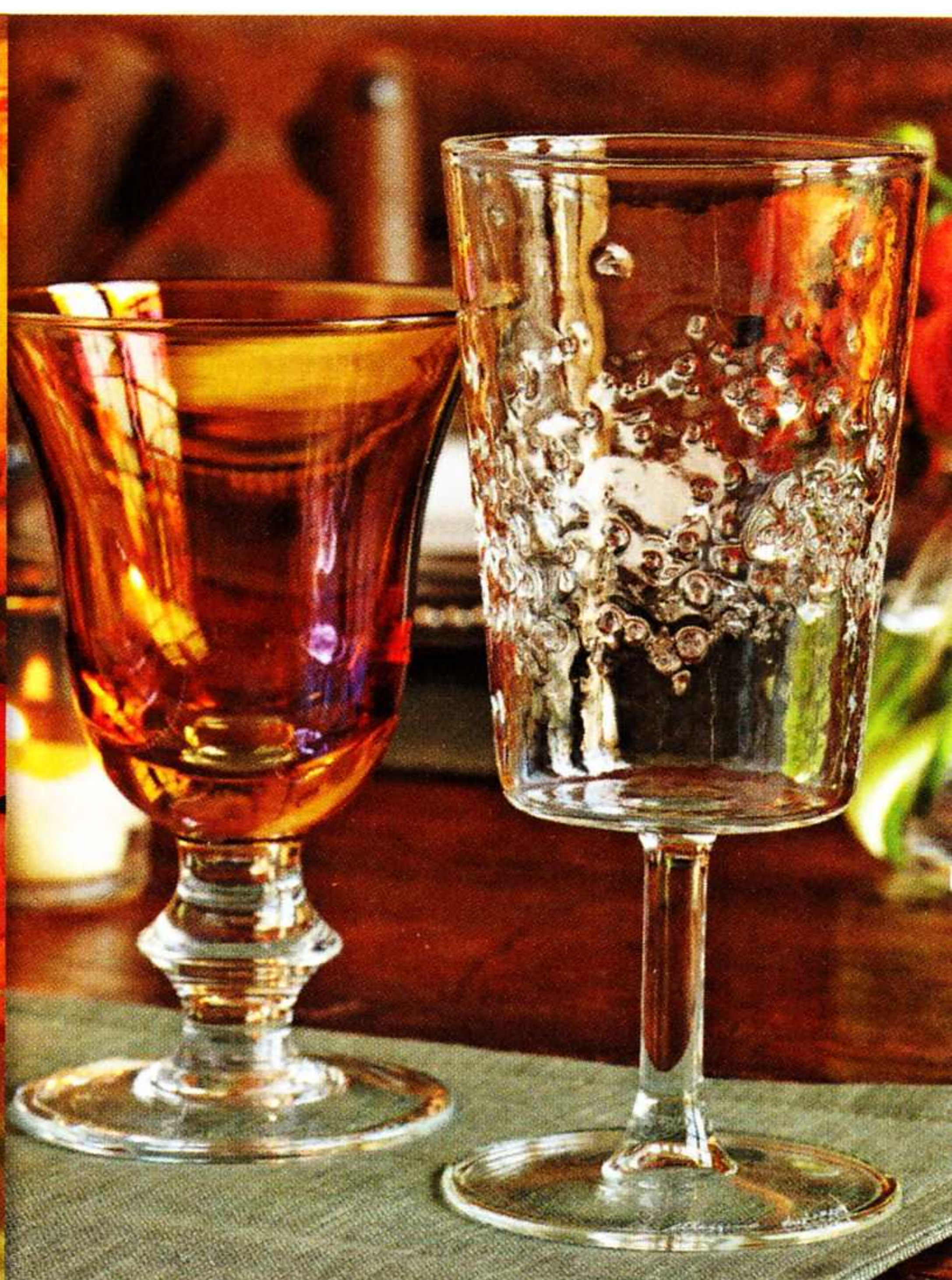
## Cause for Color

A laid-back table setting with many brown components calls for bold colors like these orange ranunculas that uplift the tablescape. Flowers are by Mariani Landscape ([marianilandscape.com](http://marianilandscape.com)).



## Glass Act

Introduce glasses that have texture and mimic the table's accent color. The “Ambra,” amber glass and “Minerale” bubble glass are both from Arte Italia ([arteitalica.com](http://arteitalica.com)).



## Rubies & Greens

Ruby-red grapefruit and raspberries make this spinach salad a delightful crossover from winter to spring. Dressed with a champagne vinaigrette, its sweet, citrusy notes cleanse the palate after the rich Osso Buco.

## Natural Curiosities

Salt-and-pepper shakers are the perfect opportunity to add a bit of whimsy, like these vintage garlic-head pieces from Frank's personal collection. Linen napkins and placemats are made of “Arabesque” in Mallard by Rose Tarlow ([rosetarlow.com](http://rosetarlow.com)).

## Pewter Power

Heartier food choices call for weighty dinnerware. “Tesoro” glass chargers with beaded rims are by Arte Italia. Pewter-rimmed ceramic dinner and salad plates are “Convivio” from Match ([match1995.com](http://match1995.com)).



## menu

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Roasted Cauliflower Soup  
with Sea Scallops

Osso Buco  
and Mushroom Risotto

Grapefruit & Spinach Salad  
Champagne Vinaigrette

Spice Cakes  
Apricot Caramel Sauce



Roasted Cauliflower Soup is served in “Tuscan Piccola” bowls from Arte Italica ([arteitalica.com](http://arteitalica.com)).

## GREAT GATHERINGS

### Roasted Cauliflower Soup

The dinner menu was created by Joe Schroeder at Gerards Personal Chef (847/651-9883).

- 8 fresh or frozen sea scallops
- 1 large head cauliflower, cut in florets
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- Salt and ground white pepper
- 1 cup finely chopped onion
- 1 medium leek, sliced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can chicken broth
- 2 cups whipping cream
- Chicken broth (optional)
- 1 ounce American black sturgeon caviar
- Shaved Pecorino cheese
- Truffle oil (optional)

Thaw scallops, if frozen. Pat dry with paper towels; cover and chill until just before serving time. Preheat oven to 375°F. Place cauliflower on 15x10x1-inch baking sheet. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons oil; sprinkle with salt and white pepper. Toss to coat. Roast, uncovered, 30 minutes or until tender and just beginning to brown.

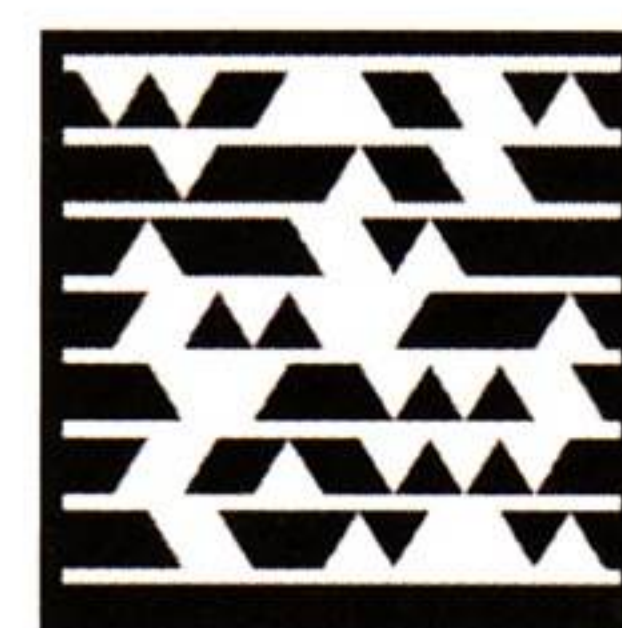
In large saucepan heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium heat. Add onion, leek, and garlic. Cook and stir 10 minutes or until soft. Add roasted cauliflower, chicken broth, and cream. Bring to boil; reduce heat and simmer, covered, 10 minutes. Cool slightly.

With immersion blender or food processor, blend soup until smooth. Return soup to saucepan. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Heat through. Add chicken broth to reach desired consistency.

In large skillet heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil over medium-high heat. Sprinkle scallops with salt and pepper; cook in hot oil 2 to 3 minutes or until brown and just opaque in center, turning once halfway through cooking time.

Place one scallop in each serving bowl. Spoon soup around scallop. Garnish soup with caviar and Pecorino cheese. Drizzle with truffle oil. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

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carriage house of what was once a 500-acre estate, and it has become the go-to spot where Frank and Becky now enjoy casual dinners and indulge in their extensive collection of wine, housed in temperature-controlled units at one end of the room.

“Our property is full of architectural history,” explains Frank. “Long ago, the estate included 27 buildings, and we live in what was the gate lodge. It’s interesting to dine in the Pour Room, because not only does it speak to the casual but elegant way we prefer to entertain, but it acknowledges the transformations we’ve made.”

Outlined in worn brick, the interior walls of the small, narrow Pour Room beg for furniture that supports its country charm. Weathered café chairs skirted in ivory-colored linen surround a rough-hewn French farm table that has a perfectly imperfect

finish marked by dents and scars. Frank opted not to use a tablecloth that would hide its rugged patina. Instead, sage green placemats establish each setting.

Wanting to enhance the Pour Room’s old world aesthetic, Frank chose sturdy porcelain dinnerware that sports a handsome pewter rim. The substantial pieces were an ideal choice for a hearty menu of cauliflower soup, traditional Osso Buco, a spinach salad with grapefruit, and warm spice cakes. Voluminous glass service plates elegantly frame the hefty pewter-edged dinnerware.

The napkin—a faded, Batik-like print in sage green—is tied with vines clipped from the outside walls of the carriage house. Amber wine goblets and water glasses with bubbles blown into the glass offer textural and colorful departures from the usual ▶



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## GREAT GATHERINGS



The cohesive and polished qualities of designer Frank Ponterio's tablescape in his Pour Room create a beautiful contrast to the rough, weathered patina of the old table.

clear water glasses. Flatware is also stylishly mismatched. Knives with resin handles made to look like tree bark contrast with the modern sensibilities of vintage midcentury Dansk soup spoons, while orange ranunculus and ferns dance down the middle of the table. All is illuminated by purposely burned-down pillar candles.

"Candles burned midway with wax dripping down the sides are more natural than using new ones every time you throw a party," explains Frank. "Candles that have obviously been used before make you wonder what the last gathering was and who attended."

The Ponterios could have used the carriage house for anything. In fact, it was first outfitted as an office for Becky, but they prefer it as the spot where they celebrate and enjoy their passions for food and wine.

"When you buy an old house, you always get that one surprise spot, whether it's a little nook or a secret room that makes the house individual, with its own unique character," says Frank. "For us, that space is the Pour Room. Because it's separate from our house, every time we step into it, we are reminded that we are there for a special reason." ■

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