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## STYLE & TRAVEL

### Summer Dinner Party Leaves the Oven Cold

#### TRICKS OF THE TRADE:

**Ken Oringer**  
Chef and Restaurateur

By CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN

Once temperatures heat up, chef Ken Oringer likes to turn to a particular form of entertaining: the no-cook dinner party.

For Mr. Oringer, who likes to throw such parties in his Boston home, his New York City apartment or his in-laws' Atlantic Beach, N.Y., beach house, there's great appeal in such parties, which rely on food you can prepare without heating up the oven or stove.

**A big mistake home cooks sometimes make with no-cook dinner parties: They 'serve dishes that are too bland,' says Ken Oringer.**

"It's lighter," says Mr. Oringer, chef and owner of Clio, Uni, Toro and Coppa in Boston as well as Earth in Kennebunkport, Maine, and Toro in New York City. "You're using a lot of spices and vinaigrettes and oils" for flavor.

Also, everything usually can be prepped ahead of time and assembled just before guests arrive. That way, you can spend more time with your friends, he says, "instead of cooking and stressing, having one person behind the grill sweating and worrying that if they leave the grill, the chicken is going to burn."

As a general rule of thumb, he says, cooks should remember that "when you serve things cold, they should be more highly seasoned than when you serve things hot."

For the full dinner-party experience, Mr. Oringer likes to start with canapés, sometimes serving oysters with an unusual vinaigrette. (A favorite combines pureed strawberries with wasabi and chives.) "I'll always do some kind of funky version of a

hummus, perhaps using argan oil, which has more of a nuttiness to it than olive oil," says Mr. Oringer, who likes to blend marash peppers, a Turkish red pepper, dried chili and Israeli za'atar, a blend of Middle Eastern herbs, into his hummus.

In the same vein, he may offer up a guacamole with a twist, sometimes working pistachios, nectarines and Mexican cotija cheese into the mix. "When I entertain I like for people to have dishes that look familiar but they taste unusual," he says.

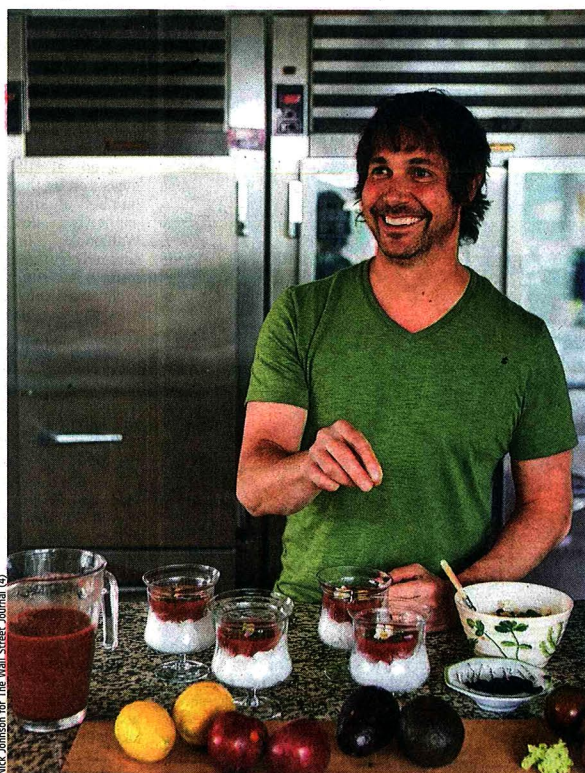
Chilled soups are an easy starter with wow factor, he notes. "I love strawberry gazpacho. It's really, really fun and it's not really sweet," says Mr. Oringer, who tempers the sweetness of the strawberries with sherry vinegar, fresh herbs, jalapeño, salt, olive oil and, occasionally, anchovies.

Or, "I'll do a chilled yogurt and cucumber soup with cumin and calamint (an herb that tastes like mint and oregano)," he adds. He often prepares these soups ahead of time, dishes them out and then sprinkles on arugula flowers right before serving. "I like to go for a presentation that's very summery and of the garden."

Mr. Oringer says one thing he likes about no-cook meals is that he gets to be more experimental with flavors, as diners tend to notice them more in such dishes.

"When you cook food, especially with grilled meat, sometimes they have such strong flavors," he says. Vegetables and fruit provide "a more open canvas."

This applies to main courses as well. Mr. Oringer loves serving a fresh tartare—fish, lamb or veal, perhaps. Or, he'll blend roasted carrots with beets and fashion them into little meat-like mounds for a vegetarian



Wick Johnson for The Wall Street Journal



Mr. Oringer's burrata with pickled plums, left, and charred summer guacamole with nectarines, right, with chips and beer. For recipes, visit. [WSJ.com/Food](http://WSJ.com/Food).

tartare. Sometimes, he purées fresh oysters together with mayonnaise to create an unusual accent around a tartare dish.

Ceviche is always a crowd-pleaser, and Mr. Oringer likes to add "things

like tomatoes and watermelon to make them a little more interesting," he says.

"And then I love serving these with wow factor—in Japanese pottery, on crushed ice.... When you see crushed ice, it makes you want to eat cold food and makes it seem more refreshing."

Many summer ingredients lend themselves well to no-cook dishes, Mr. Oringer notes.

"I love shellfish, clams, oysters, avocados, chicory, all sorts of summer herbs, mint and cilantro, dill and all these intense soft herbs like chervil," he says. "And you can make five-minute pickles very easily with nectarines, rhubarb or asparagus or ramps."

Sometimes, Mr. Oringer likes to have very fresh vegetables be the star of a plate. "You can take zucchini, cutting it really thin, drizzling that with sumac, crushed red pepper,



Ken Oringer, left, prepares strawberry gazpacho with yogurt and tuna in a beach house kitchen in Atlantic Beach, N.Y. Above, in the garden, where many summer ingredients lend themselves to no-cook dishes, he says.

#### Five Tricks

- ◆ Season cold foods more than you would hot foods.
- ◆ Be more experimental with flavors because diners tend to notice them more in cold dishes.
- ◆ Serve cold food on crushed ice to make it look more refreshing.
- ◆ Make fresh vegetables the star.
- ◆ Leave out honey or sherry vinegar so guests can add some kick to food.

lemon zest and lemon juice and throwing on some parsley, cilantro, pistachio oil and mint," he says.

He often sets out honey or single-barrel sherry vinegars on the side, in case guests are seeking a little extra kick.

To mix things up, Mr. Oringer sometimes has one cooked item on the menu. He grills avocados ahead of time, for example, then "throw them on warm tortillas with salsa verde and maybe just a little cheese and chopped cilantro."

A big mistake Mr. Oringer sometimes sees when home cooks put together no-cook parties is, "they'll underthink things and serve dishes that are too bland."

Instead, he encourages people to "be creative and be ethnic—mix yogurt with tahini and throw in some mint and chilies and jalapeños and you can make so many things with that that are so tasty."