

For some Toronto chefs, the planning started immediately after last year's festival. Restaurants, hotels and the slingers of high-end hors d'oeuvres must figure out what to serve celebrities who have eaten at the finest restaurants in the world, and what to pour for desperate hangers-on who believe one martini at the right bar might land them a trip to Lake Como as the future Mrs. George Clooney.

"I still don't know to this day how I prepare," said Stephen Ricci, executive chef at the Windsor Arms Hotel. "The sous chefs are probably going to be dead by the end of the week."

Like most Toronto foodies heavily involved in the festival, Mr. Ricci does not see his children for the 10 days the stars are in town. He and other chefs around the city must contend with the hectic demands of private parties, late-night room service and gala dinners, all while keeping their specially created restaurant menus available for daily patrons who arrive to nibble, sip and stare.

Many of the men and women in whites arrive at their kitchen stations at 5 a.m., when some celebrities are just hitting the sheets, and work through breakfasts for 150 and evening cocktail parties for 500.

Food orders arrive at back doors as constantly as the paparazzi show up out front, and organic fruit suppliers are kept on call like A-list plastic surgeons.

The Four Seasons Hotel's grocery bill doubles to \$70,000 for the week of the festival, and almost every kitchen in town increases the

number of cooks in the kitchen, not to mention dishwashers, expeditors and pastry chefs.

"It's a nightmare," Mr. Ricci said. "But it does allow us to show off."

FRESH FISH, BREAKFAST SHOOTERS AND ... CHICKEN POT PIE?

In the coming days, Paul Boehmer, chef at the Rosewater Supper Club, will prepare meals for zombie connoisseur George Romero, Booker Prize-winning author Ian McEwan, Academy Award nominee Kiera Knightly and retired general Romeo Dallaire.

The restaurant is one of the official venues of TIFF, although every kitchen in town can claim to be whipping up dishes for some festival attendees.

Tomorrow night, Mr. Boehmer's kitchen will play host to the opening night gala, where 500 people will nibble medallions of monkfish and tuna tartar with Dungeness crab.

Fish is the big trend for this year's festival, so long as it is fresh, farm-raised and politically correct, and Mr. Boehmer plans to offer salmon gravlax - fish cured with salt, sugar, dill and peppercorns - to the 300 guests of the party for *Atonement*, starring Ms. Knightly.

But while some boldface festival attendees weigh less than the average rib-eye steak, that does not mean Toronto's chefs are limiting their menus this week to wheat-grass shooters and tofu stacks.

For the annual *In Style* magazine party at the Windsor Arms, Mr. Ricci plans to serve his 500 guests sea salt potato chips with shrimp relish and braised short ribs.

"Everybody's into the ribs again," he said.

An African-themed event in honour of Jane Goodall - who

salad, while Mr. Ricci said almost every film party at the hotel will feature a vodka and caviar station.

In the morning, as stars and stargazers rouse themselves for another day on the circuit, the Windsor Arms has concocted a menu of breakfast shooters, organic protein meals and a cleansing tonic finished with golden beet juice and mint, a recipe the chef jokes he perfected by regularly getting drunk.

For those with slightly harder appetites, there is a Wake-Me-Up Benedict with Tabasco hollandaise and beef filet in place of the traditional Canadian back bacon.

"Pork products are a big no-no," Mr. Ricci said.

At the Four Seasons, executive chef Robert Bartley is overseeing the construction of 200 elaborate chocolate installations, which are put in the room of every visiting star but almost never eaten.

This year, the Four Seasons has themed its menus to 1920s Hollywood glamour, and Mr. Bartley has been researching early 20th-century food trends and film titles.

He will serve Moroccan-style Casablanca chicken wings and Sherlock Holmes martinis served on magnifying glass coasters.

But the hotel's main event is the annual George Christy luncheon, an elite party where 140 are invited for cocktails and 80 can stay to eat, meaning that at least 60 people every year attempt to

sneak in for the culinary main attraction: chicken pot pie.

The entree's recipe is only slightly modified each year, Mr. Bartley said, when Mr. Christy, a former Hollywood Reporter gossip columnist, calls in his seasonal preference for oregano or thyme.

For this, the 23rd annual luncheon, he has requested phyllo pastry instead of puff and an "Attack of the Heirloom Tomato" appetizer.

"It's George's type of food," Mr. Bartley said. "He dictates. He's so tired of the gourmet food."

RICH RECIPES FOR EXCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENTS

Tony Loschiavo, on the other hand, is a proponent of over-the-top richness in his recipes.

The head of L-Eat Catering, an official partner of TIFF, his catering company is booked solid with private soirees, charity dinners and press conferences. But Mr. Loschiavo said planning what to offer at each venue is a challenge.

"These people are throwing a lot of money around," he said. "And they want stuff people haven't seen before."

With most clients, he is asked to prepare a menu that is vetted and amended by organizers, and for this year's Best Buddies event at The Carlu, a 400-seat charity fundraiser with special guest Burt Reynolds, L-Eat is going with upscale variations of classic fare.

Mr. Loschiavo's seared foie gras sandwiches with peanut butter and jelly will be served on mini Ace Bakery brioche, and popcorn bags handed out before screenings will be filled with Cajun-spiced popcorn shrimp.

Grilled New York steak will

served in a cone with French fries tossed in parmesan and truffle oil.

"If you're going to have the calories, you might as well go all out," he said.

At this time of year, Mr. Loschiavo's biggest problem is not what to make, but finding people to serve his creations.

A lot of the actors and actresses in the city work as waiters for catering companies, and during the film festival, Mr. Loschiavo said, many of them attend galas, screenings and parties.

"Half our staff really want to work the events and half really can't," he said. "Some of our key people are actors."

SPECIAL (AND BIZARRE) REQUESTS HONOURED HERE

At the Drake Hotel, a festival hangout for players who consider themselves more boho than Bloor Street, chef Anthony Rose has challenges of his own.

Besides the 15 large-scale private dinner parties he already has booked during the festival and the demands of his regular clientele, his kitchen is routinely informed at the last minute that a big shot is coming in, and they must clear the back door and prepare something special.

"They usually don't show," he said.

But when they do, Mr. Rose said TIFF attendees can bring some unusual food requests along with their entourage.

Last year, one star delivered the kitchen a handwritten note specifying exactly how she wanted her breakfast cooked. Her egg was to be poached hard for five minutes and 45 seconds. One piece of whole grain toast was to be buttered, while a slice of

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