

ASHLEY CLAY

Volume 1 // Issue 1

lifestyle magazine

INVITE *your* HOME

to the party
**9 Strategies that make
hosting simple**

MAC & CHEESE

**Three Ways
for the Holidays**
*This one recipe is all
you need to satisfy
any cheesy craving*

BEST FRIENDS:
*How hiring her mom,
Rhonda, was the best
decision ever made.*

PLUS:
Chef Ashley's
Ferguson-
inspired home



WELCOME

Ashley Clay: Loving, Living, Lifestyle

How do you throw a memorable party, an event where the details are right, your guests feel loved, and the host is at ease?

Welcome to my magazine. Welcome to my home. I'm *Ashley Clay*. After years of preparing food and decor for amazing clients, I'm turning the tables to invite you to my party.

I believe in making home the center of our lives. Home should be full of love: a joyful place where every room is inviting, the table is always set and ready to entertain, and there is food to fill the soul. Home should be the setting for making memories that last a lifetime.

Making your home inviting can be part of your everyday life, which makes putting on an event much easier. For instance, the right lighting can set the mood or the right appliances can make everyday entertaining easier. The secret is to create a life you enjoy living, and invite your guests to share your life with you. The articles in this magazine will get you started. I also rely on my friends at Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting to help bring the vision for my home to life. Also, look for my A-Rules-easy-to-remember principles to help guide you.

I'm from the South, where hospitality is a living, breathing part of our culture—it is an expression of our authentic selves. But I believe this is true about all corners of our country and the world, too. It's such a joy to live life—real life—where we're always ready to enjoy our family and friends. Life is meant to be celebrated.

Ashley Clay



Table of Contents

Invite Your Home to the Party
pages 4-5

Brunch: Sweet Potato French Toast
page 6

Maple-Glazed Salmon
page 7

Mac & Cheese Three Ways
pages 8-9

9 Party Basics Checklist
pages 10-11

Holiday Table Top Checklist
pages 12-13

Home Essentials for Hosts
pages 14-15

Make Every Room Inviting
pages 16-17

Friends for Life: Ashley and
her mother, Rhonda
page 18

Be Present at Your Own Party
page 19



The "A" is in the Details

INVITE YOUR HOME TO THE PARTY

Home is the perfect place to make memories and share your life with people you love. Hosting is easier and enjoyable—if you start with yourself.

What does it mean to invite your home to the party? So many people hesitate to invite guests to their homes, for many reasons:

1. They feel they can't afford it, that their home isn't perfect,
2. They know what they want in a party but don't know how to do it, or
3. They feel the space isn't large enough to host a group.

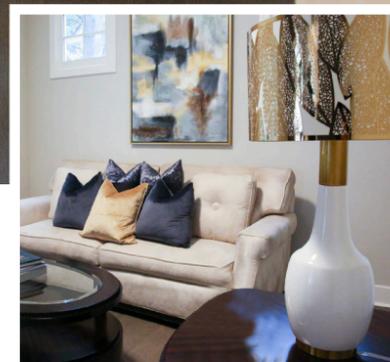
Whatever your reason may be, you'll find some extremely helpful and easy tips throughout this magazine to get you started on your journey to becoming an expert party host.

Your home is the most important and memorable space to host a party. It's where we feel extremely loved, and it's where you can invite your guests into your life. According to Ferguson Kitchen, Bath & Lighting Gallery, the kitchen is the hub of the home- it's where friends and family gather, so more than any other room in the house, it should reflect the way you live.

But, what's the main ingredient to hosting a fabulous party?

Well, a happy host of course.

“A-Rule:
Create a home that reflects your lifestyle.



We encourage and celebrate living the life you really want- every day- starting at home. Life is short. A happy host should love their space and wake up with the intention to live their life to the fullest. We want to help you create a home that will inspire that lifestyle.

Your home is the embodiment of your personality, your hopes, your dreams, your happiest moments. Your home is your safe haven. Whether you enjoy modern, traditional, contemporary, transitional or rustic décor, your home should be an extension of who you are.

If you are in a small space, you can incorporate pieces that do double duty—for example, covering the top of your dresser with a linen and using it as a buffet.

Once you're ready to host a party for guests, you'll only need to add a few themed pieces to create a successful party. (Use the checklists on pages 10-17 and the A-Rules throughout to guide you.)

Your home is an expression of yourself, and you should feel good about inviting people into both your space and your life. After all, your guests are coming to spend time with you—and your home is where you should be your best self.

The most important rule to inviting your home to the party is inviting yourself first.

The “A” is in the Details

SWEET POTATO FRENCH TOAST

Make breakfast or brunch for a crowd!

Ingredients:

4 eggs
3/4 cup milk
3/4 cup sweet potato puree
1/2 cup sweetened condensed milk
2 Tbsp. confectioners' (powdered) sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 Tbsp. ground cinnamon
Salted butter for griddle and serving
10 slices Texas toast (or other white bread such as Challah or French bread)
Warm maple syrup
Cranberry-Pecan Chutney
Brown Sugar-Candied Bacon

Get our Cranberry-Pecan Chutney recipe at chefashleyinc.com/recipes

Brown Sugar Candied Bacon

Ingredients:
1 pound Applewood-smoked bacon slices or thick cut bacon slices
1/3 cup (packed) golden brown sugar
1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted

Preparation:
Position 1 rack in top third of oven and preheat to 400°F.

Line a large rimmed baking sheet with foil. Place a large rack on top of the lined baking sheet.

Arrange the bacon slices in single layer on the rack.

Whisk together the brown sugar and melted butter. Brush each bacon slice with the brown sugar mixture. Bake until the bacon is crisp and glazed, 15 to 18 minutes. Cool 5 minutes and serve.

Preparation:

Preheat an electric griddle to 350°F (a non-stick skillet set over medium heat also works fine).

In a mixing bowl, beat the eggs lightly. Add the milk, sweet potato puree, sweetened condensed milk, sugar, vanilla, and cinnamon. Whisk until well combined. Pour into a shallow dish large enough to accommodate the bread slices.

Butter the griddle or skillet. Dip a slice of bread into the egg mixture, allowing a few seconds for it to absorb mixture. I also squeeze the bread gently to soak the mixture to the center. Flip the bread slice and coat the opposite side.

Transfer the soaked bread to the griddle and cook until golden brown on the bottom. Remove the bread. Butter the griddle once more, flip the French toast to the opposite side and cook until golden brown.

Serve warm with butter, warm maple syrup, Cranberry-Pecan Chutney, and Brown-Sugar Candied Bacon.



Watch the Home & Family french toast cooking segment

www.hallmarkchannel.com/home-and-family/videos/sweet-potato-french-toast-home-family

MAPLE-GLAZED SALMON

This salmon recipe is both quick and elegant. Serve with candied pecans and your favorite sides.

Ingredients:

1 to 1 1/2 lbs. fresh salmon filet
1/2 cup soy sauce
3 Tbsp. pure maple syrup
2 Tbsp. fresh grated or minced ginger root
1 tsp. ground ginger
1/2 cup candied pecans

Preparation:

Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Mix the soy sauce, maple syrup, fresh ginger, and ground ginger. Pour glaze into a shallow dish. Marinate the salmon, skin side up, in the glaze for 5 minutes.

Transfer fish to an oven-proof skillet. Sear over medium-high heat for 2-3 minutes on each side.

Pour glaze over the fish. Place pan in the oven. Bake for 8 minutes or until the fish flakes easily. Top with candied pecans and serve.

BONUS: Peach & Cinnamon Lemonade with Fresh Mint

Ingredients:

6 cups of water
1 cup of sugar or sweetener
3 lemons, juiced (about 1/3 cup lemon juice)
1 can of peach daiquiri mix OR peach puree
1 cup frozen lemonade concentrate, thawed

2 cinnamon sticks
4 cups of ice
thinly sliced peaches
fresh mint
liquor (whiskey, dark rum, or vodka optional)

Preparation:

In a large pitcher, combine 6 cups of water with the sugar, lemon juice, peach daiquiri mix or puree, and lemonade concentrate. Add the cinnamon sticks.

Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Leave the cinnamon sticks in until they infuse the lemonade with the amount of flavor you want, about 30 minutes or longer. Remove the cinnamon sticks.

Add 4 cups of ice; use crushed ice in summer for a more refreshing drink, and cubed ice in winter to make a cocktail.

Pour mixture into glasses over ice. Garnish with thinly sliced peaches, fresh mint and liquor of your choice—you can use any brown liquor or vodka, and you'll be sure to have your guests dancing before the end of the evening.



The "A" is in the Details

MAC & CHEESE THREE WAYS

One flexible recipe gives you a quick mac, a classic baked mac, and slow cooker mac

Ingredients:

16 ounces elbow pasta, uncooked
6-8 ounces VELVEETA® Original
4 cups milk, divided
2 eggs, lightly beaten
1 tsp. kosher salt (or to taste)
1 tsp. seasoning salt
1 tsp. black pepper
1/2 cup heavy cream
2 cups (about 8 ounces) mild cheddar cheese, shredded

1 cup (about 4 ounces) Italian cheese, shredded
1 1/4 cups (about 5 ounces) sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (substitute other cheeses as desired)
8 Tbsp. (1/2 cup) margarine or butter, cubed
fresh parsley (optional)

Preparation:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Cook the pasta according to package directions to al dente; don't overcook.

While the pasta is cooking, make the cheesy sauce. In a sauce pot or in a microwave-safe bowl, melt together the VELVEETA and 1 cup of milk over low heat and whisk until smooth. Set aside.

Drain pasta, rinse in hot water. Transfer pasta in a large bowl and add the salt, pepper, seasoning salt, and margarine or butter. The butter or margarine should melt from the heat of the pasta to coat the pasta -- allow it to melt completely before the next step. Taste the pasta; if it doesn't taste salty now, there won't be enough salt in the finished dish.

Add the heavy cream, 2 cups of the milk, and all of the cheeses. Combine thoroughly. If you could eat the pasta at this point without cooking further, you're on the right track.

Add the cheesy sauce, followed by the eggs. The key to a creamy mac is how you add the eggs -- pour the eggs even throughout the pasta mixture and whisk side to side to form a custard in the pan. Choose a method to finish cooking the macaroni and cheese—either stove top, slow cooker, or baked, and enjoy.



Three Ways To Achieve Delicious Results

Stove top variation:

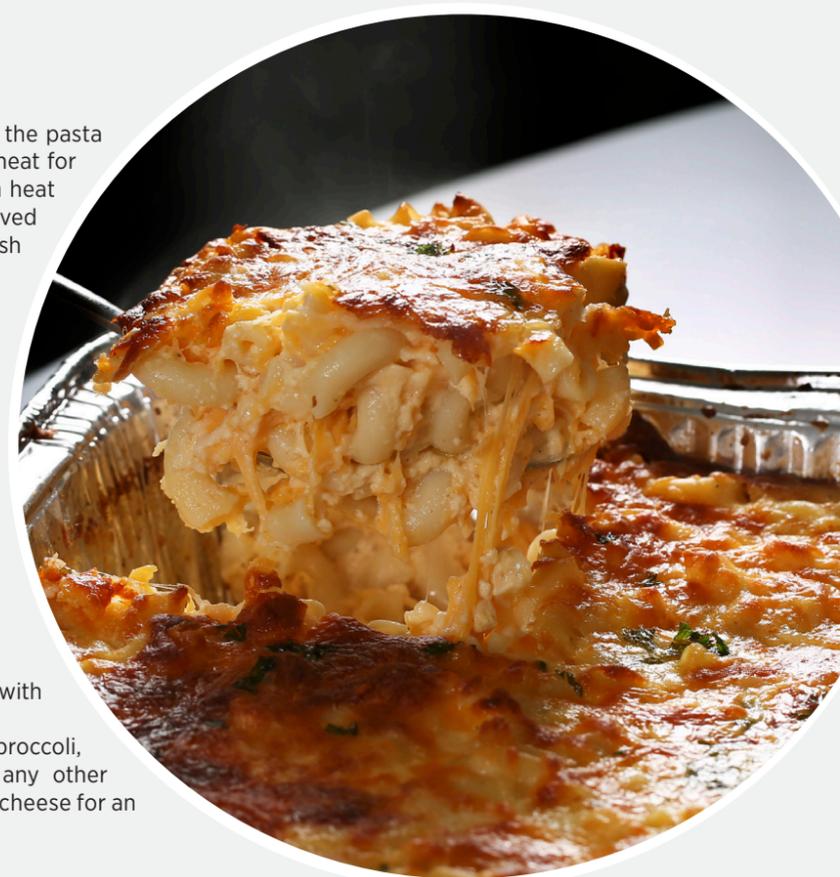
Use only 3 cups of milk.
Cook the cheesy sauce in a 2-3 quart saucepan. Add the pasta and other ingredients. Stir, cover, and cook over low heat for 20 minutes. Once the cheese is melted, remove from heat and let sit for another 20-30 minutes. Add some shaved Parmesan or bread crumbs for a light topping. Garnish with parsley and serve.

Baked:

Follow the recipe, and transfer the mixture to a 9x9-inch medium aluminum pan or 9x9-inch casserole dish. Make sure everything is thoroughly distributed. Top the mac and cheese with additional shredded cheese, and fresh chopped parsley. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes; do not overbake. Take a toothpick or a skewer in the middle of the pan to test the doneness -- if there's more oil than milk, the mac is done. It may be a little jiggly but it will firm as it cools. Allow to cool for 20 minutes. Enjoy.

Slow Cooker:

Make the cheesy sauce, and add it to the slow cooker with other ingredients.
Cook on low heat for an hour. Consider adding some broccoli, cauliflower, turkey, chicken, diced baked ham, or any other protein and vegetable at this point. Cook the mac and cheese for an additional 90 minutes.



Personalize your mac with cheese

Look to a cheese board for inspiration to add flavor to your pasta

Brie: This cow's milk cheese is extra luscious. Some are nutty; others are pungent.

Comté: Perhaps France's most popular cheese. It's aged, and has a flavor that's nutty with a hint of butterscotch.

Feta: A sheep's milk cheese with salty, briny flavor. Crumble it into your mac.

Gouda & Smoked Gouda: This cow's milk cheese from Holland is often mild, fruity, and nutty. Aged Gouda has hints of caramel or toffee. Smoked Gouda is intense, so use it carefully.

Parmesan: The king of Italian cheeses with a sharp flavor. Grate it into your base or on top of your mac.

Emmentaler (aka Emmental, Emmentaler): This is the classic cheese for fondue, so melt it into your base for an incredible mac. It's a cow's milk cheese from Switzerland with a mild, savory flavor. You can also mix it with Gruyère, a Swiss cheese with a sweet, nutty flavor.

Colby Jack: Monterey Jack is California's mild cheese that is very flexible; the Colby Jack blend is a great cheese to melt into your base. For extra flavor, look for other Monterey Jack variations such as Pepper Jacks, or others with garlic, spices, herbs, chile peppers, onions, and more.



The "A" is in the Details

Photo Credit (Parmesan): DepositPhotos

ASHLEY CLAY | 9

INVITE YOUR HOME TO THE PARTY: THE PARTY BASICS CHECKLIST

Live. Life. Party!



“**A-Rule:**
Live life every day as if you're
hosting the perfect party.

Party

9 Secrets to hosting events they'll always remember

Half the battle of a successful party is planning—and a checklist is a great tool. If you already have your home prepared to host yourself every day, then that's even less planning you have to do. Use this list of essentials and extra touches to help you host a house party that's warm, welcoming, and memorable.

- 1. The entrance is everything.**
Choose a great welcome mat or entry piece, such as a wreath or flowers, to welcome your guests. Include lighting, too. When people drive up, they should feel you are ready for them.
- 2. Welcome guests with a warm or seasonal fragrance.**
Avoid fragrances that overwhelm the senses, but definitely use something that adds to the sensual experience of walking into your house.
- 3. Greet guests visually.**
A beautiful floral piece, or art on wall, expresses your personality and sets the tone for the party.
- 4. Offer a drink at the door.**
A warm cocktail, tea, coffee, cider, or a glass of wine encourages guests to enjoy the celebration from the start.
- 5. Nosh!**
Offer a nibble to your guests as they come in. Or, if not a bite to eat, use music or the television to set the ambiance and tone of the party.
- 6. Involve guests in creating a keepsake.**
Create a memory piece for the occasion by putting out a guest book for people to sign, or writing messages to the mom at a baby shower. Encourage this at the beginning of a party to help people be present.
- 7. Use your appliances in creative ways.**
Too often, appliances are our best friends during the day and worst friends at a party. Change that! Fill your sink with ice and use it to hold beer. Have your griddle warm and use it for holding appetizers (just be sure to put a sign that says "hot"). Put a large slab of marble over your stove, take the knobs off, and use it as a food serving board.
- 8. Give them a keepsake.**
People love items that are personalized for them! If you're using a valet (or if you have your teenager parking the cars), have the valet put a small gift in your guests' cars.
- 9. Lighting makes all the difference.**
The right lighting can make your party sparkle. The product experts at Ferguson recommend installing decorative, energy-saving, low-voltage landscape lights to illuminate a path to your door or using a dimmer in the dining room to create ambiance.

Remember: People will come back and celebrate with you again if they know they'll be warmly welcomed and they'll get to create memories with you.

The "A" is in the Details

INVITE YOUR HOME TO THE PARTY: HOLIDAY TABLE TOP CHECKLIST

Set your table, while setting the mood for a festive meal they'll never forget

1. Choose table decorations that are festive and encourage conversation. Greenery, garlands, and other festive decorations that add holiday charm should be enough to create a celebratory mood, but still allow people to talk to each other across the table and move their arms around the table freely.
2. Candles always help set the mood and create warmth at the table. Keep them at a low height, like other decorations, to encourage conversation.
3. Embellish place settings with a personal holiday arrangement of small ornaments, decorations, or florals. This arrangement doubles as a keepsake for your guests.
4. Here's how a set of glass plates pay off: You can customize them for your party theme by putting place mats, linens, doilies, fall leaves, or other appropriate decorations underneath them.
5. Remember, you can set the table two to three days in advance. You want to be relaxed and enjoy your guests.
6. Give your table some interesting shapes and dimensions by changing the shapes. For example, chargers can be square instead of round. Be sure the plates on top fit well so they won't tip. Purchase chargers and plates in white or other neutral colors so they will accommodate any occasion.



The “A” is in the Details

INVITE YOUR HOME TO THE PARTY: HOME ESSENTIALS FOR HOSTS



“A-Rule:

Use white or neutral colors throughout. They easily adapt to any party or holiday theme by adding colorful flowers accent pieces and decor.

Entertaining is much easier once you've got the basics.

Throwing a party or a celebratory dinner is much more approachable for you as a host when you furnish and prepare your home for it. Over time, a basic set of home wares will grow, and you'll be able to cross-utilize the pieces for any occasion. You don't have to spend a lot— purchase pieces that are consistent with your home instead of buying pieces for each occasion.



Photo Credit: Williams Sonoma



Photo Credit: Williams Sonoma

Here's what to include:

- A white or glass pitcher or carafe
- White pots, such as enamel cast iron, for presentation pieces
- Copper pots for presentation pieces
- Hand towels
- High-quality soaps that moisturize the skin
- High-quality hand lotions and moisturizers
- Linens and tablecloths that are signature to the style of your home
- Chair covers to protect your furniture, or foldable farm chairs that complement your home

The “A” is in the Details

INVITE YOUR HOME TO THE PARTY: MAKE EVERY ROOM INVITING

Something special in each room—even the bathroom—can do the most to make guests feel welcome. Here's how to make it easy.

You've been to house parties where it seems the host knows everything you love—everywhere you turn, there's something thoughtful. What's their secret?

Remember this **A-Rule**: As a host, whatever comforts you and makes you relax is also going to comfort 90 percent of people. So when you approach what to put in a room, approach it from a place of comfort. And, if you follow Ashley Clay's advice to make your home a place where you feel welcome every day, you won't have much to do to make it feel welcoming for your guests, too.

Try these touches:

- Offer hand towels in the bathroom—not paper towels—for guests to dry their hands.
- Add ambiance to your bathroom with a

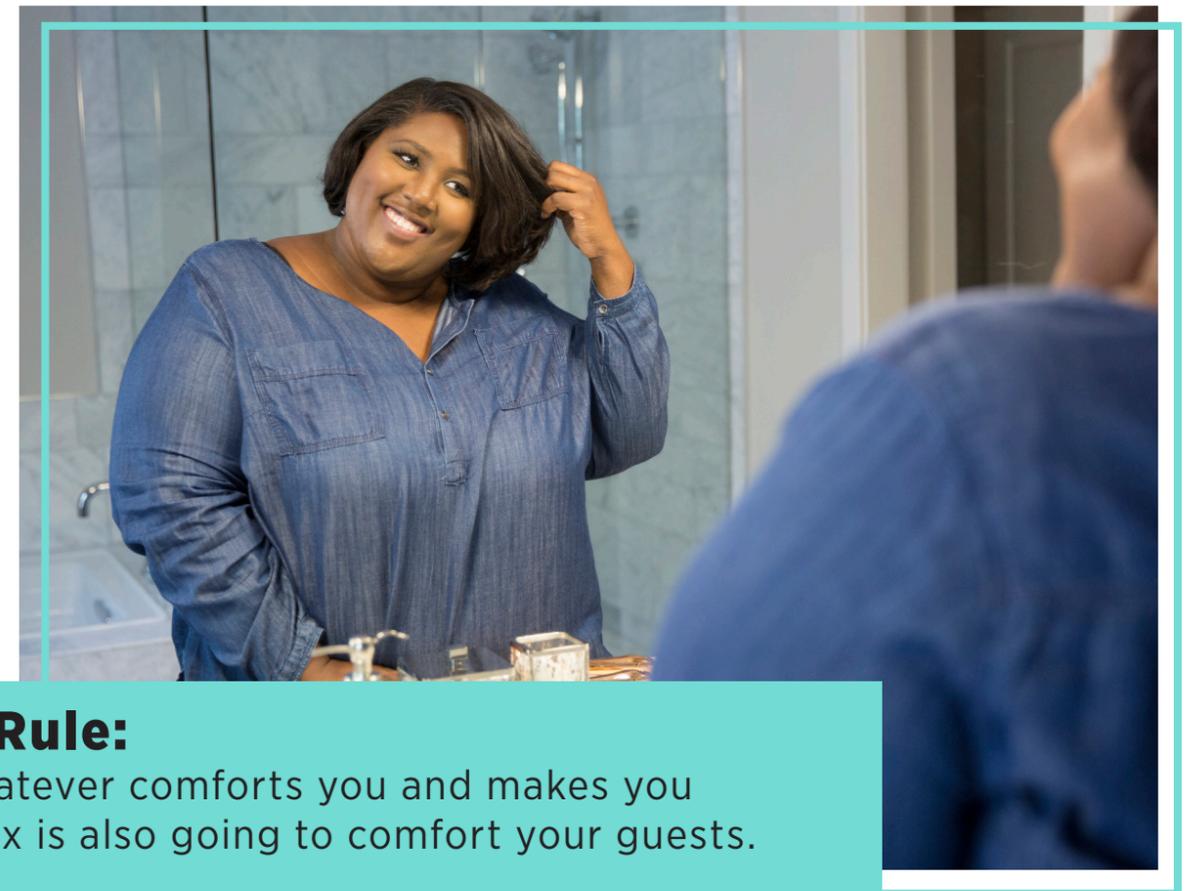


beautiful flower, inspirational pieces, a book of quotes, dimmed lighting, and a light fragrance that isn't too overwhelming.

- Create a spa-feel by stocking your bathroom with some higher-end soaps, hand creams and moisturizers, and white towels.
- Provide basic toiletries for overnight guests, such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, high-quality razors, combs, hair wraps, lotions, bath soaps, and towels.
- In the guest bedroom, a new pair of socks and white tee-shirts for people to sleep in are especially thoughtful.

If your powder room is feeling outdated, you'd be surprised at how switching out the faucet and hardware to a more modern design will breath new life into the space. Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery has options to fit any style and budget.

Finally, don't forget this important **A-Rule**: **Be authentic to your place.** Add a signature piece in each room that reflects your personality. If you're a health fanatic, maybe it's a carafe of freshly made fruit water. If you're a chef, maybe it's baked pastries. If you love reading, maybe it's a short stack of your favorite books. If it intrigues you, it will intrigue your guest. Bottom line: Treat your guests the way you would like to treat yourself.



“ **A-Rule:** Whatever comforts you and makes you relax is also going to comfort your guests.

The “A” is in the Details

How business dreams turned Ashley and her mother, Rhonda, into co-workers and friends.

When Ashley Clay wanted to start her own catering and lifestyle company at age 19, her mother was there to support her—financially, as a friend, and as an employee. Rhonda left Turner Broadcasting after 24 years to work for her daughter—a second career that has spanned over a decade. Here’s more about their special relationship.

Q: Rhonda, when the idea for starting Ashley Clay, Inc. came, why was it important to support your daughter the way you have?

Rhonda: Ashley had a scholarship for college, but after one year she decided she wanted to be a chef. The mother part of me wanted her to stay in college, but the friend part of me supported what she wanted to do, and I said, ‘come one, let’s do it.’ I worked in corporate America so that she didn’t have to, and that’s where our friendship comes in. I left corporate America because I wanted to work with her, and I wanted her to have her own.

Ashley: My mom definitely supported me. She’s never stood in the way of anything I wanted to try. I’m independent and strong, and it really comes from her.

Q: How is it, working with each other?

Rhonda: Let’s get it straight: We still have a mother-daughter relationship and the challenges that come with that, and working for my daughter. But at the end of the day we’re still friends. People ask, ‘how do you work for your daughter?’ I never let the work relationship interfere with the mother-daughter relationship. That’s a must—I can’t walk away from that. Ashley was my daughter first before she was Chef Ashley.

Q: Ashley, where did your love for entertaining and hospitality come from?

Ashley: My aunt, Mickey Payton, taught me to cook. She was the matriarch of the family.

Read more about Ashley and Rhonda at chefashleyinc.com/family.



BE PRESENT AT YOUR OWN PARTY

How do you enjoy a gathering? Give yourself a role you’ll love.

When you think about planning the ultimate guest experience and what you want your guests to walk away with, think about your role at the party. “If I want my guests to experience the best wine and cheese, then I’ve become the sommelier that night, and I have to prepare to be that person,” Ashley says.

When you do the same, you’ve assumed a role that is necessary for your guests to have the experience that you want to give them. It forces you to be interactive and present. “Being prepared and intentional about your presence makes the difference,” says Ashley.

“A-Rule:
Be authentic to your place.

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