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L.A. Look



*Local designers at **DIFFA's Dining by Design** event created tabletop looks in keeping with the city's character.*

Although the Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS's annual Dining by Design fund-raiser tour has come to Los Angeles twice before—once in 2002 and again in 2004—the organization's special events manager, Steven Williams, felt as if he was bringing this year's event here for the first time. "We didn't look at it as coming back, but as a new event altogether—it's been so long since we've been here, it's like starting over," Williams said. "So really the challenge this year was just starting the event here."

Part of that challenge entailed finding a venue that would accommodate 27 table designs. Dining by Design invites a group of designers and sponsors to create inventive dining environments within an 11- by 11-foot space, and typically results in an elaborate showcase of event ideas and design trends. "It was difficult finding a venue out here that was large enough, wasn't undergoing renovation, and was available," Williams said. He settled on the L.A. Mart, in part because DIFFA has a longstanding relationship with the Merchandising Mart properties—Chicago's

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Dining for Design event has taken place in the Chicago Merchandising Mart for years—but also because the venue’s second floor and lobby underwent a recent renovation.

The Los Angeles event, which began on Saturday with a cocktail reception and wrapped up Monday night with a gala dinner, marked the third stop in an eight-city tour. “L.A. is a very important market to our sponsors,” Williams said. “It’s also a market where DIFFA does not have a lot of presence, so we hoped to get our hands around L.A. a little bit, which can be difficult.”

Although the L.A. event was on a slightly smaller scale than the New York fundraiser, which kicked off in April with 39 tables on display, Williams found that it was still comparable to its East-Coast counterpart. “Saturday’s [cocktail reception] was probably closer to New York than any of the other cities in terms of the quality and the crowd,” Williams said.

That said, a handful of the L.A.’s designers’ creations were apropos to the region, including Haptor and Barrett’s table, which acknowledged Hollywood by projecting black-and-white films from the 1920s against a wall, and decorating tabletops with small Chinese take-out boxes filled with popcorn.

In another nod to the region, beachy decor popped up at Paul Bott’s table, where fragments of coral served as napkin rings; and at Bliss Design’s table, an assortment of shells decorated napkin rings and wine holders. Bliss’ table was also part of a white color-palette trend apparent in designs by Barclay Butera and Janus et Cie, which prominently featured the hue in their creations. Barclay Butera incorporated paper lanterns, candles, flowers, and chair covers in the shade, while Janus et Cie bordered its table with tall white stems, and topped it with an umbrella in the same color. “Each city has its own personality,” Williams said. “L.A. seems to be fresher, lighter, and not quite as ornate as, say, New York.”