

HALLOWEEN & PARTY EXPO

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Dina Manzo to Appear at Expo

By Amy Francisco

Dina Manzo, star of the HGTV party-planning series *Dina's Party* and former member of the cast of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, will share her ideas and techniques with attendees of the Halloween & Party Expo on Jan. 29, 2012, in Houston, Texas.

The event planner and interior designer will share her favorite party-planning tips with Expo-goers and demonstrate how to create a party tablescape from 1 to 2 p.m. "For me, it's building a story. It's not just plopping some dishes down," says Manzo, whose New Jersey-based company Designer Affair has been throwing "over the top" events since 2005. "You start with the linens, and it's all about layers and textures and interest and unexpected surprises. You want your guests to not only enjoy the food; you want the food to be enhanced by the surroundings."

Manzo says she looks forward to attending the Expo to share tips with others in the industry. "I just love to inspire people. I think that's what it's all about," she says. "Everyone in this industry needs to look to each other for new ideas and inspiration."

Dina's Party on HGTV (Saturdays, 10 p.m. EST) is Manzo's newest vehicle for sharing her party-planning and design savvy. The show, which debuted in September 2011, takes viewers into Manzo's clients' homes, where she and her team transform living spaces into beautiful, unique party backdrops. Season one has Manzo planning a "Spaghetti Western Bon Voyage" party, complete with a mechanical bull, and a 1980s-themed prom – for adults only.

As for which "Dina's Party" has been the most unusual, Manzo can't choose just one. "They're all unusual," she says. "That's what I do. I push the envelope. Someone comes to me with a basic idea and I take it to the next level."

Season two will include more of the how-to inspiration that Manzo loves. "We're going to change things a little," Manzo says. The show will be "more instructional" with great tips ranging from "saving money to utilizing your home in different ways," according to Manzo. "I just want to dig a little bit deeper into it."

But she'll have to work fast. Manzo says the biggest difference between planning events off- and on-camera is the time in which she has to do it. "We do a party a week, which is kind of insane," she explains. "In real life we usually have eight months to a year to plan the caliber of events we throw. [On the show] we literally have three days. We get a new party every Monday, and by Wednesday it has to be planned and set up."

Manzo says that trusted vendors in the party industry make her show possible. "I thank God that over the years I've built up a great stable of vendors so I'm able to know exactly where to go for what," Manzo says. "They've been bending over backward to help me get it done and that's great. All the years of working together in the industry are paying off now, where they can get it done for me and I can help advertise their companies."

She also credits her team and her family, especially her daughter, Lexi, and her sister-slash-catering director, Cookie Rooney, who appear in many of the episodes. "I have a wonderful team," she says. "My team is like my family. So as grueling as it is at times, it doesn't feel like work because I love the people I work with. It's so important in life to surround yourself with people who lift you up, and that's what our team does."

Meet Dina Manzo at the Halloween & Party Expo on Jan. 29. She'll be on-hand to sign autographs from 2:30 to 5 p.m., following her tablescape design demonstration. Learn more about her event-planning business at www.designeraffair.com.

The Halloween & Party Expo is endorsed by the National Costumers Association, the Halloween Industry Association and the International Balloon Association as well as Party Club of America and Paper First Affiliates, who conduct their annual meetings in conjunction with the show. The Expo is also home to the Halloween Costume Style Show, Industry Wide Celebration hosted by Party and Paper Retailer and Rubie's Annual Halloween Bash. For more information about the Halloween & Party Expo, call 877.347.3976 or visit www.HalloweenPartyExpo.com.

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