



LIFESTYLE

# I Hosted a Rooftop Dinner Party at This Hotel Overlooking Central Park

Here's how the garden-inspired experience went at JW Marriott Essex House.

BY KELLY ALLEN | PUBLISHED: AUG 19, 2025

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I dream of **hosting dinner parties** with friends often. While entertaining in a tiny **New York City apartment** is possible, even the most creative, cozy setup isn't ideal for a small group. So when I had the opportunity to **host a garden party** overlooking Central Park at the **JW Marriott Essex House**, I was elated. I really couldn't have dreamed up a more magical setting for an unforgettable night fueled by good food and even better company.

At JW Marriott properties worldwide, anyone can live out this fantasy—and customize it to their unique tastes. “Hotel guests and locals alike can design their own JW Marriott Garden Party event to connect with loved ones or celebrate special milestones, whether it’s a birthday, bridal shower, anniversary, or just a meaningful gathering,” says Bruce Rohr,



vice president and global brand leader of JW Marriott.

The events are inspired by the gardens found at every JW Marriott, which stem from founder J. Willard Marriott's daily nature walks and his wife Alice's passion for gardening. "These gardens are more than just beautiful spaces; they're living, growing reflections of our commitment to wellbeing, connection, and a sense of place," Rohr says. "The JW Marriott Garden Party events are the brand's way of bringing that philosophy to life."

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With meals made and tables dressed using fresh ingredients from the garden, the events are "a chance to slow down and reconnect, proving that spending time outdoors, in a thoughtfully curated setting, is a true luxury," Rohr says.

They already had me at "rooftop overlooking Central Park," but that sentiment sealed the deal. Here's how my experience went, from selecting the suite to host the party in to embracing the garden-inspired tablescape.

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## The Elegant Setting



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At **Essex House**, I had the option to host the garden party in one of the hotel's **Central Park Suite Collection** rooms. I instantly had my heart set



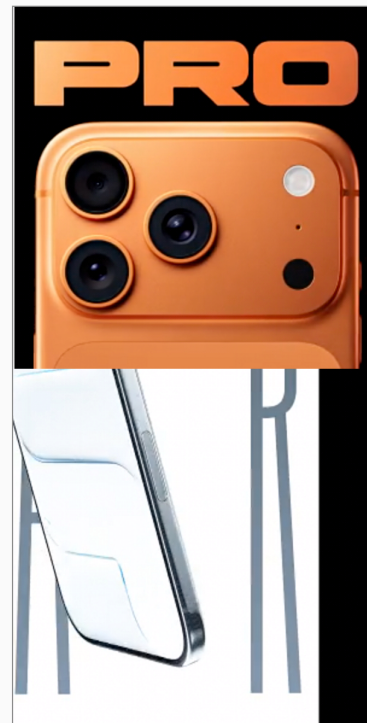
on the **Meadow Terrace Suite**, not only for its lavish outdoor space with a Central Park view, but also for the suite's charming interiors inspired by **America's first interior designer, Elsie de Wolfe**. The blush pink furnishings, golden accents, and marble-clad bathrooms exude elegance.

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Hosting the event in the two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom suite allowed me to play Central Park South homeowner for the evening. Had we not lucked out with the weather, the backup plan was to move into the hotel restaurant **Bourbon Steak**'s private dining room—which still would've been lovely but not the same!



All the suite needed was one finishing touch: good music in the background. I made two playlists: one for cocktail hour and one for dinner. The first is a little more upbeat, while the former is slower at times and more jazz-heavy, with a few songs sans lyrics. The hotel provided a portable speaker, which I was able to easily hide in a potted plant near the dinner table on the terrace.



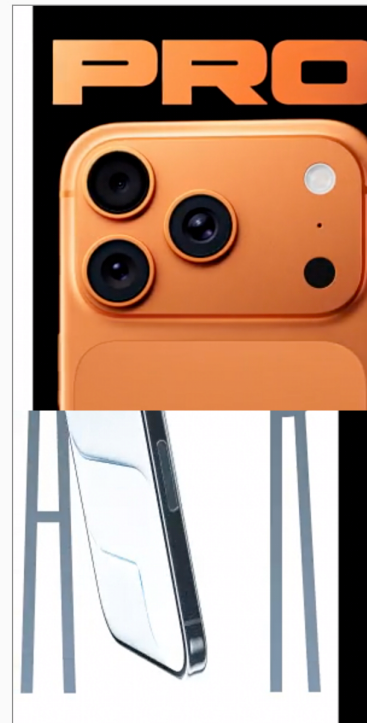
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## The Garden-Inspired Tablescape

Every JW Marriott Garden Party features signature elements, starting with a long table in a linear position. I had some flexibility with guest count and chose to have a total of eight attendees (including myself), because Stanley Tucci once told me that's his ideal number of people to have at a dinner party. I have to agree!





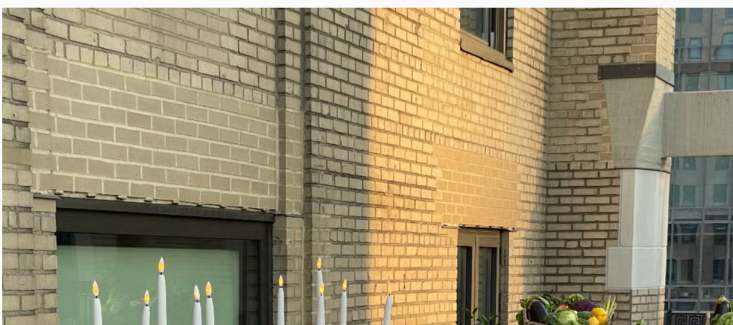


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On the table, the optional yet typically included elements are a sustainable centerpiece and seed paper menus. Instead of cut or dried flowers, the table features food and garden varieties that are meant to be consumed, repurposed, or composted. The seed paper menus, featuring floral motifs, ensure zero paper waste.

Along with all those signature components, the hotel team collaborated with **Meridian Events** to create a mood board for the overall design concept of my table. They suggested a purple, green, and silver color palette with cabbageware, vintage silver urns, plum-hued glassware, and plenty of fruits and veggies (broccoli, artichokes, grapes, green apples, and more). While I wouldn't normally opt for purple, I figured I'd embrace something a little out of my personal style zone.

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To enhance the tablescape, I requested name cards. The team sent me four fun options: an artichoke with a guest name satin ribbon, a floating frame with the guest name pressed onto a leaf and flower, a personalized silver herb snip, and a floral mister with an engraved name. I chose the floral mister because my favorite dinner parties have left guests with functional keepsakes to remember the evening by. Plus, I thought they'd double nicely as decor. I keep mine on my bar cart as a shiny, sculptural accent. I also like that the floral misters brought more silver contrast to the edible green-and-purple centerpiece.







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The resulting tablescape was an abundant display, right in line with the proposed concept. The only thing I would've changed would be the faux, light-up taper candles. They were necessary for safety, considering the wind knocked some over at one point, but shorter versions could've been nice or tealight candles with tall, glass-walled holders. Or if the terrace had more lighting on it, unlit beeswax taper candles burned to have dripped detail could've been another alternative. In any case, it was a lovely setup for the garden-themed celebration.



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# The Cocktail Hour and Dinner

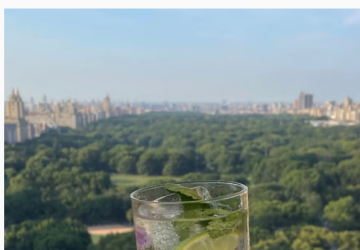
Ahead of the garden party, the JW Marriott team made digital invites for me to send out to my guests, asking them to join me in celebrating summer, a season of renewal and abundance, and to "slow down, step outside, and reconnect with the natural world."

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Before dinner, guests arrived for cocktail hour to enjoy the evening's signature drink: a mojito with a mint-infused ice cube. Naturally, the mint came from the JW Garden, which is technically made up of small terrariums at Essex House. Every garden party features a key ingredient, usually an herb from the garden or sourced locally, and mint was the chosen ingredient for this occasion.







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Every JW Marriott Garden Party starts and ends with a toast. The commencement salutes good health, and the end-of-meal toast offers a moment for gratitude. While I admittedly forgot to read the first toast at the beginning, I ended the night with both for good measure.

Other signature touches of these events include a butter candle and artisanal bread. Everyone received a *personal* garden herb butter candle to indulge in with olive-infused bread (specifically, picholine and kalamata olives). As a self-proclaimed olive hater, I surprisingly enjoyed it.

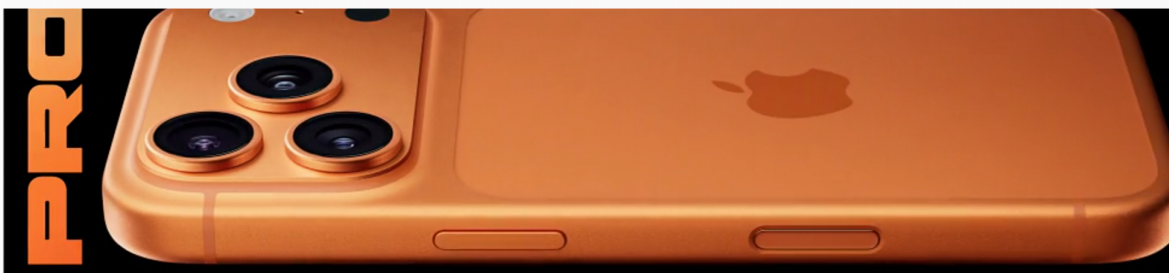


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As for the rest of the meal, I was able to select a starter, main, and dessert from options suggested by the chef. The menu turned out to be different from the selections I originally made. There was lamb instead of filet and baked Alaska instead of a fancy shaved ice dessert. Nevertheless, it was still a divine lineup; chilled Maine lobster salad, Japanese sea urchin toast, and warm summer tart for the starters, la boîte Urfa-



dusted lamb for the main, and baked Alaska and red fruits for dessert.



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I was also able to include a vegetarian option (as I am one myself), which was a golden beet “ravioli” made of fava bean nuage. Ultimately, everyone enjoyed the meal—some of the choices I didn’t pick even ended up being guest-favorites!



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The evening is forever cemented as one of my top memorable New York



The evening is forever cemented as one of my top memorable New York nights. If you're eager to host your own special garden party in New York or elsewhere, the JW Marriott team recommends reaching out to the JW Marriott property you want to host the event at a few months in advance. Since each party is personalized, the length of the planning process and pricing will vary based on everything from your meal selections to the number of guests you invite.

For those who aren't that into hosting but want to still want to get the experience, "some JW Marriott hotels do host signature JW Marriott Garden Party events throughout the year, where individual guests can reserve a seat and enjoy the experience alongside others," Rohr says. "These vary based on location and season, so we encourage checking with the hotel directly for upcoming dates."

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