

If he'll give him any lines. Tom Cruise has claimed that he'd like to star alongside his pal David Beckham. 'I'd love to do action movies with Beckham,' he told a UK newspaper at the Mission: Impossible 4 premiere in London. Perhaps Beckham could be lined up as a baddie in the next Ethan Hunt outing, or perhaps it's just a shameless attempt to win headlines



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When entertaining a crowd, particularly during this time of year when parties are in full swing, platters of canapés are often the default dining solution of choice. They require far less effort, manpower and oven space than cooking a three-course meal for 30.

Regardless of whether you're going to prepare those bite-sized morsels yourself or invite someone else to do the hard work, careful planning is of utmost importance.

If you are outsourcing, make sure you book well in advance and are completely clear on the service the company will be providing. Things to consider include: the selection of canapés and quantity, whether they will be prepped on-site or delivered ready made and if extras such as serving plates, napkins and cutlery, a server or two and washing-up duties are included.

For those who decide to self-cater, it doesn't matter whether you've invited 10, 20 or 30-plus guests, the guidelines for success remain the same.

Andy Campbell is a trained chef who has experience catering for film premieres and large corporate events; he now runs Chef for Hire, a UAE-based company specialising in private dinners and parties. Campbell says that while it's nice to offer a selection of canapés, there's no need to go overboard. "In terms of choice, a good formula to work by is one canapé featuring red meat, one white meat, two fish and one vegetarian option. Serve two hot, the rest cold."

Size is crucial. Remember that canapés should be eaten in two (delicate) mouthfuls. Your guests won't thank you if they find themselves not only clutching a glass, making small talk, swaying to the music and concentrating on not spilling anything down their new party frocks, but are also given a plate, knife and fork to juggle.

Quantity wise, Campbell suggests working on a basis of eight canapés per person. For a party of 20 people, that comes out at 180 canapés – but before panic sets in, remember that simple elegance, rather than finicky fuss, is the aim.

Don't be afraid to take a few shortcuts: for example, shop-bought deli items such as marinated vegetables, stuffed peppers and pickled squid or mushrooms all look great when decanted into pretty serving bowls. For a homemade touch, buy good quality olives and marinate them overnight in extra virgin olive oil, garlic, a few sprigs of rosemary, thyme and some pared lemon zest.

Crostini are considered classic canapés for good reason: not only are they versatile, they're quick and easy to prepare. To make the bases, slice slim baguettes or ciabatta loaves into thin disks, drizzle with olive oil, season with salt and black pepper and cook in the oven until crisp and golden brown. Leave to cool, then store in an airtight container. These can be made two or three days in advance.

For toppings, it's entirely up to you. For something simple but still attractive, decorate the discs with a spread of cream cheese, a dot of green pesto and a quartered olive or sun dried tomato or make a simple pea and mint purée and spread over the toasted bread, finishing off with shavings of pecorino cheese and a scattering of lemon zest. Sear a couple of sirloin steaks in a hot pan, leave to cool and cut into thin slices – a little goes a long way – and serve on crostini with whole-grain mustard and crème fraîche (whisk the two together until stiff) and rocket leaves.

Dice feta, cherry tomatoes, black olives and cucumber, add olive oil and pile on to the toasted breads for miniature Greek salad bites, or top the rounds of bread with ripe Brie, roasted halloumi, goat's cheese or pâté and a dot of your favourite chutney.

Smoked salmon grissini swirls make excellent canapés, not least because their elegant appearance belies just how easy they are to make. Lay slices of smoked salmon out on a chopping board and spread the upper surface with a layer of cream cheese. Season gen-

* expert help

Options for those who don't fancy making the canapés themselves

Dish

Dish will supply the canapés, a chef to prepare them on-site and servers. Canapés on their current menu include popcorn-crust scallops with ginger and corn purée, cigar smoked Wagyu with radish and frisse lettuce and pumpkin and cumin pizzetta with harissa and candied walnuts. They also have larger "bowl and fork" options. For more information, visit www.dish.ae or email info@dish.ae.

Lime Tree Cafe and Kitchen

The Lime Tree offers a catering service all year round but is currently running a special Christmas menu until January 5. Their flavourful options include: figs poached in pomegranate with Brie and fruit bread, festive toasties filled with stilton, Parmesan and caramelised onions and crispy roasted duck crepes with hoisin, among many others. They too can provide serving staff, platters and serving bowls. Orders must be placed 24 hours in advance. Visit www.thelime-treecafe.com or email catering@limetreecafe.ae.

Yes Chef!

This company operates across the UAE and caters to all dining needs – from formal meals, to brunches, barbecues and fine-dining dinners. Their Christmas canapé party menu includes steak tartare on toast, stilton and chutney rarebits and mini yuletide logs and can be adapted according to customer requirements. Email info@yeschef.ae.

* Emily Shardlow

erously with black pepper, sprinkle over chopped chives and finely grated lemon zest and cut the salmon into thin strips. Then simply twist these strips around shop-bought grissini (with the cream cheese side down to help the salmon stick) and serve in a tall glass.

Little skewers or cocktail sticks make ideal vehicles for canapé party fodder. Try marinating cooked prawns in lime juice, soy sauce, honey and ginger for an hour or two, before shaking off the excess liquid and threading on to skewers, along with a small piece of diced mango. Caprese salad on a stick is another favourite, which thanks to the brightly coloured ingredients, also looks festive: skewer a small piece of mozzarella, half a cherry or sun-blushed tomato, a bit of basil, drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Oven-baked apricots, figs or dates wrapped in turkey bacon or stuffed with Gorgonzola cheese also appeal.

There's nothing wrong with serving crisps and nuts at a canapé party, just make sure you do them right. Shop-bought miniature poppadums are the perfect shape for topping with a spoonful of mango chutney and a little mint raita, and flour tortillas can be cut into eighths, sprinkled with olive oil and baked in the oven for home-style crisps. Spiced nuts taste great, too. Coat a selection of your favourite nuts with egg white, brown sugar and spices (ground cumin, cinnamon and paprika work well) and toast in the oven until crisp, then leave to cool and break into pieces.

While Campbell's bespoke canapé parties feature all manner of intricate offerings, from choux-pastry buns with foie gras mousse and caramelised spiced fig to saffron-infused lobster and prawn risotto balls with tamarind and coriander dipping sauce, he has created a number of more simple but still delicious canapés, right.

• For more information on Chef for Hire, visit www.chefandycampbell.com

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Andy Campbell's canapé recipes



Vegetable frittata (makes 20 canapés)

1 medium potato, peeled
1 leek (white part only), chopped
1 medium aubergine
2 courgettes
3 large eggs, beaten
1 tbsp chopped basil
1 tsp grated Parmesan
10g butter, at room temperature
salt and black pepper
olive oil

Slice the potato lengthways into 2cm-thick pieces and cook in salted water for five minutes, drain and set aside. Sauté the leek in a tablespoon of oil for three minutes, or until soft. Slice the aubergine and courgette

lengthways into 2cm-thick pieces and cook in a little oil for two minutes on each side, or until golden brown.

Preheat the oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/gas mark 4. Mix the eggs, basil and Parmesan together and season with salt and black pepper. Brush the bottom of an eight-inch (20cm) loaf tin with butter. Arrange a layer of potato across the base, pour over a little egg mix, then add a layer of aubergine, followed by layers of red pepper, leek and courgette, adding a little egg mix between each one.

Transfer to the oven and cook for 25-30 minutes. Allow to cool, then cut into 2cm by 2cm squares and serve at room temperature.



Bharat spiced lamb loin with endive and walnut dressing (makes 20 canapés)

1 tbsp olive oil
1 lamb loin, trimmed of fat and sinew
1 tbsp Bharat spice mix
3 tbsp walnut oil
1 tbsp red vinegar
2 endives, trimmed, washed and dried
20 walnut halves, toasted
salt and black pepper

Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Roll the lamb in the spice mix, then place in the pan and cook for two minutes on each side. Cover loosely with foil and leave to rest for five minutes.

Whisk together the walnut oil and red vinegar and season with salt and black pepper. Slice the lamb into thin rounds and place a piece in the centre of each endive leaf. Top the meat with a walnut half and drizzle over the walnut vinaigrette just before serving.

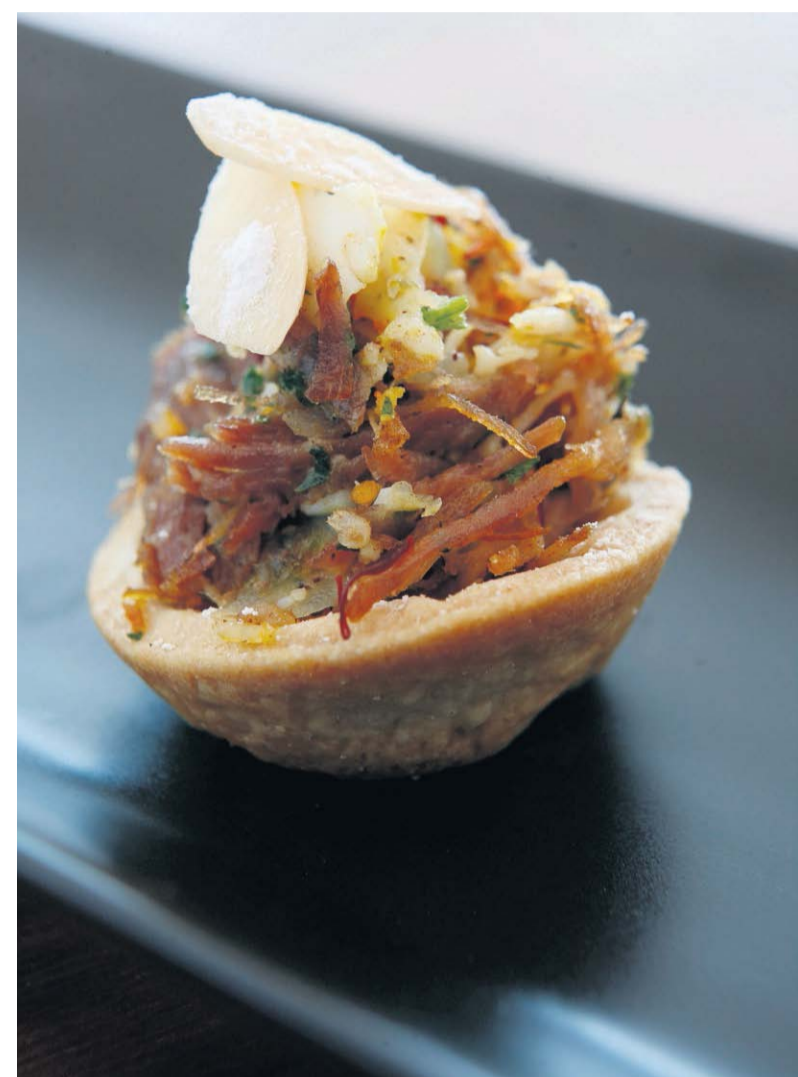


Lobster croquettes (makes 25 to 30 canapés)

35g butter
35g flour
435ml milk
2 tbsp vegetable oil, plus extra for deep frying
6 button mushrooms, finely chopped
1 medium onion, peeled and finely diced
300g cooked lobster meat (crab or prawn could be used instead), finely chopped
150g plain flour
4 large eggs, beaten
340g breadcrumbs (panko breadcrumbs work best)

Melt the butter in a pan over a low heat, add the flour and cook for six minutes, until light brown. Stir in the milk, bring to the boil briefly, then remove the pan from the heat.

Place a frying pan over a medium heat, add two tablespoons



Cinnamon spiced confit duck in pastry cases (makes 25 canapés)

2 confit duck legs (buy them ready cooked from your butcher or supermarket)
1 tsp butter
1 medium onion, peeled and finely diced
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp saffron
1 tbsp flat leaf parsley, chopped
1 hard boiled egg, chopped
25 small butter or filo pastry cases (shop bought is fine)
2 tbsp quince jelly
3 tbsp flaked almonds, toasted
icing sugar, for dusting



Photos by Antonie Robertson / The National

Warm the duck legs through in the oven or on the stove, remove the skin and shred the meat into pieces.

Place a pan containing the butter over a medium heat. Add the onion and sauté gently for four to six minutes, until softened.

Mix the onion, cinnamon, saffron, parsley, egg and duck meat together in a bowl and season with black pepper.

Place a small dot of quince jelly in the base of each pastry case, then fill with the spiced duck mixture. Sprinkle over the flaked almonds and dust with icing sugar just before serving.

of vegetable oil, followed by the chopped onion and cook for three to four minutes. Increase the heat slightly, add the mushrooms and cook until all the liquid that is released has evaporated.

Stir in the lobster meat (or crab or prawns), add the white sauce and season with salt and black pepper. Pour into a tray lined with cling film and place in the freezer for 20 minutes.

Tip the flour, eggs and breadcrumbs into individual bowls. Roll the cooled lobster mixture into walnut-sized balls. Dip the balls first into the flour, followed by the eggs and finally the breadcrumbs.

Half-fill a deep, thick based saucepan with vegetable oil and heat until a small piece of bread sizzles and turns golden brown in 30 seconds (190°C/375°F if you have a thermometer). Add the breadcrumbed balls and cook for three minutes, until crisp and light golden brown. Drain well and serve warm.

Citrus-cured salmon (makes 20 canapés)

340g smoked or cured salmon
1 lime, zest and juice

For the dressing:
1 Lebanese cucumber, peeled, deseeded and finely diced
1 stick celery, peeled and finely diced
2 medium tomatoes, peeled, deseeded and finely diced
1 red pepper, finely diced
½ small red onion, peeled, finely diced
1 tbsp coriander, finely chopped
1 tsp dill, finely chopped
1 lemon, juice only
olive oil and red vinegar (to taste)
black pepper

Leave the salmon to marinate in the lime juice and zest for a few hours or overnight. Slice into thin strips and roll up to form little wheels.

For the dressing, mix all the fresh ingredients together in a bowl and season with olive oil, red vinegar and black pepper. Arrange the rolls on a large plate, spoon over the dressing and serve.