

Annie Falk



by Rola Tassabehji

The Art of Entertaining, The Spirit of Giving

Annie Falk—spouse of **Michael Falk**, CEO members since 2018 and CEO Palm Beach City Chairs—may be best known for her impeccable taste and creative ideas in event planning. But, it is her ability to use those attributes to support causes and help communities, while bringing joy to others, that makes her stand apart.

Creating the Perfect Party Experience

Since its inception in 2016, The Salonniere, an award-winning website dedicated to the art of entertaining, has named Annie as one of America's 100 Best Party Hosts, alongside honorees such as Reese Witherspoon and Oprah Winfrey. Her love for event planning started at an early age with a fascination for gathering people in festive surroundings. "As a very young child, I would create structures in the middle of my parent's living room, with giant Tonka toys and drape blankets overtop, and invite

my siblings to join me for tea and treats," says Annie. "Throughout my career and life, I have always been pulled into event planning. I think it's primarily because I love the magic of creating scenes as well as my appreciation of food." Later, while working for a modeling agency in New York, New York, USA, she began to organize major events and eventually branched out to become an independent consultant in corporate event planning, building a reputation for organizing legendary parties with a meticulous attention to detail.

"While the material side of entertaining is exciting and creative—arranging flowers, preparing fabulous meals, creating a signature welcome drink—it is the level of soulfulness that is more important; the human connection, human creativity and well-being," says Annie. "It's easy to get caught up in creating an impressive, beautiful setting but this should never take precedence over a guest's comfort and well-being. Whether you are creating a grand event or simply serving your child a meal, the goal is the same: To express care and love."

Leveraging the Social Impact of Food

Annie credits a big part of her hosting skills to an appreciation of food. "The food part began as a young adult, in the late eighties, when I was engaged to Michael and we were going out regularly to some of the famous French restaurants in New York City." With the help of her friend André Soltner, an internationally recognized French chef, she started to learn cooking. "André organized for me to study with the legendary chef Roger Vergé at Le Moulin de Mougins in Provence, France. That really started my path in the food world, and also my appreciation for the discipline of these incredible French chefs."

Annie is invested in society's changing relationship with food. "As we gain a deeper understanding that convenience foods are literally making us sick, many individuals are turning back to home cooking. In the 50s, fast, canned and packaged food was seen as a way for women to escape kitchen duties and be more independent. Times have changed and our relationship with food changes again," says Annie. Through her foundation, Annie supports The American Heart Association's Teaching Gardens Network, which supports school and community gardens to ameliorate the healthy eating challenges facing U.S. children and families.



Sharing Generously

For Annie, entertaining is all about "sharing generously." Since moving from her native New York to Palm Beach, Florida, USA in 2011, she has channeled her culinary passions into charity projects.

"My event planning has spilled over into philanthropy. I donate a lot of my time and effort to plan events, including big galas of up to 600 or 700 people," she says. She has created numerous events to support humanitarian projects alongside the world's

most recognized names in entertainment, fashion and society, including Usher and John Travolta.



Her award-winning books offer a glimpse of her entertainment star power—taking readers into beautiful estates and sharing information and recipes,—as well as her spirit of giving. Her first book, *Palm Beach Entertaining: Creating Occasions to Remember*, benefits the Children's Home Society of Florida, which serves families in need. Proceeds from her second, *Hamptons Entertaining: Creating Occasions to Remember*, go to the Peconic Baykeeper, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving the aquatic ecosystems of Long Island's South Shore. "In each book I highlight the work of the organizations I support," she says. "Hamptons Entertaining includes a list of the impaired water bodies in our area. No one wants to eat shellfish from polluted waters, or game whose diet is loaded with chemicals. And you can't talk about food without talking about the environment. Eating locally and supporting our local food shed and our local farmers is something that's really important to me."

A Well Set Compass

Philanthropy has long been important to Annie. "Growing up my parents always believed in giving back and we did that through hands-on volunteering, a philosophy I grew up with that gave me an appreciation for what we have and an understanding of how others live," she explains. Annie has passed this philosophy on to her two girls, giving them opportunities to go beyond traditional grant making to experience the many faces of philanthropy.

Today, The Michael and Annie Falk Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of children and to preserving the environment. A recent initiative at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment established a laboratory for environmental exposomics, an emerging scientific field that assesses the effects of environmental contaminants on human health. Annie also serves as the American Heart Association's Palm Beach Teaching Gardens Ambassador, among many other roles in nonprofit community organizations. Her commitment to philanthropy has won awards and accolades, including the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, the Bookvana Award, the March of Dimes Champion Award and having her name read into the Congressional Record. When reflecting on how to leverage social gatherings to support causes and advance ideas, Annie adds, "Whether it's a book on lifestyle and entertaining, a documentary, or a message you impart through lectures or the arts, do it in a way that feels authentic, combining drive and passion with a well-set compass." ☺