

A FASHIONISTA SLEEPOVER THAT'S A RUN(A)WAY HIT!

child

When his innovative, design-savvy niece wanted a special birthday bash, event planner extraordinaire Bryan Rafanelli created a splendid slumber party with a fashion show theme.

By Kathy Henderson ♦ Photography by Brooke Slezak

At the parties he's planned for the likes of Hillary Rodham Clinton, Michael J. Fox, and Giorgio Armani, Bryan Rafanelli has transported guests to ancient Rome, a Moroccan bazaar, and a medieval palace. But no soiree meant more to this Boston- and Palm Beach-based event coordinator than the eighth birthday party of his beloved niece Jillian.

"I wanted her to feel like a star," says Rafanelli, 44, who transformed his sister's suburban Boston home into a combination costume shop, photo studio, and runway for Jillian's slumber party extravaganza. For Jillian, who had never hosted a big slumber party—and at age 8 already uses silk scarves as belts—a fashion sleepover made perfect sense. "Ever since she was little she's been very creative, with a unique sense of style," Rafanelli says proudly. "I chose this theme to reflect her personality and everything she enjoys doing."



DESIGNER DETAILS

Starting with an elegant invitation (left) and ending with individual "dress" cakes that the kids could decorate (far left), Rafanelli kept the fashion theme consistent.

ALL IN THE DETAILS

Of the 100 parties Bryan Rafanelli plans a year, about 10 are for children. Rafanelli shares a few of his secrets. **CELEBRATE YOUR CHILD'S PERSONALITY AND INTERESTS:** A theme helps every element of the party fall into place. A fashion sleepover was perfect for Jillian, and Rafanelli planned an informal outdoor party for her athletic sister, Abby, when she made the soccer team. **OFFER LOTS OF FUN FOOD:** The current craze for "tasting menus" is perfectly suited to children's parties, says Rafanelli. **PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS:** As his mother used to do, Rafanelli routinely sets the table for a party several days ahead to make sure everything looks great and nothing has been forgotten.

After dinner and dessert, the guests relaxed in the great room on sleeping bags placed atop the foam loungers, now transformed from a fashion runway to an oversized play area with colorful pillows featuring flower and sun designs. They watched videos and played games until late at night.

"My party was so great," gushed Jillian. "Uncle Bryan had everyone treat me and my friends like we were really models." Her mom (Bryan's sister), Toni, agrees: "Jillian never told Bryan specifics about what she wanted, but she knew she wanted her birthday party to be special. Bryan made her dreams come true."

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