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## State Department Dinner Reels in Rafanelli, Andrés, and Four Secretaries of State

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Boston-based [Rafanelli Events](#) exercised restraint when it came to the decor at a Thursday night celebratory dinner, hosted by secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton in the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room at the U.S. State Department. Standing in the center of the heavily detailed and richly draped Franklin, the building's largest of 42 Diplomatic Reception Rooms, Bryan Rafanelli gazed from side to side at the venue's series of massive Corinthian columns and gilded decorative plasterwork. "The room is so extraordinary, so you don't want to compete with it," said Rafanelli, who also planned Chelsea Clinton's wedding in July 2010.



Still, the fragrance of hundreds of gardenias could not be missed. The evening also brought some historical touches: [José Andrés Catering](#) prepared a meat-and-potatoes-based, three-course menu of dishes, each with a historical hook. And past secretaries Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright, and Henry Kissinger were all on hand.



The occasion marked the 50th anniversary of the Diplomatic Reception Rooms, honored former secretaries of state, and gave a nod of thanks to the Patrons of Diplomacy endowment campaign committee and donors. The \$20 million fund-raising effort contributes to continuing conservation work and educational outreach for the estimated \$100 million collection of historic furnishings, as well as the recent renovation of the Franklin Balcony, a wide terrace that runs along the south flank of the dining room. In her remarks, Clinton called the eighth floor expanse overlooking the National Mall "the best outdoor space with the best view in Washington."

The department's office of protocol, headed by chief Capricia Penavic Marshall, invited 60 guests to the pre-dinner cocktail reception and balcony-debut ribbon cutting by the secretary at 5:30 p.m. An additional 170 joined them at 6 p.m. for a program of entertainment, dinner, and awards, with NBC chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell as master of ceremonies.

Rafanelli chose a robin's egg blue, satin table covering embroidered in gold thread in a large, gardenia-like floral design for the dinner tabletop for ten and the secretary's head table for 20. (The adjoining reception room is painted in the same color.) He chose tightly stuffed mounds of blush and creamy white roses, mixed with gardenias, for the centerpieces. Most striking were the State Department-owned tall French Empire gold-plated bronze flower containers and candelabras. "It was so exciting to work with them and go into the storage collection and pick them out," Rafanelli said.



Working in cooperation with [Ridgewells Catering](#), chef José Andrés, the State Department's "culinary ambassador" and owner of ThinkFoodGroup, prepared a three-course menu, chosen by Clinton. It kicked off with a Waldorf salad composed of mixed greens, apple spheres, and toasted walnut praline topped with a lemon mayonnaise dressing. In short order, servers brought a 36-hour braised beef accompanied by mashed potatoes and pickled baby carrots. The dessert: pecan pie sharing the plate with a dollop of vanilla Chantilly cream and candied pecans. On the printed menu, each course description included an historical reference. (The beef dish, in essence, was inspired by secretary Dean Rusk's 1961 dinner for Chinese diplomats.) "That's very unique and wonderful," Andres said. "Every item had an explanation." In addition to the plated dessert, New York-based [Heather Barranco Dreamcakes](#) provided a hand-painted cake topped with sculpted sugar figures with a Benjamin Franklin theme.

After her final remarks at 8:30 p.m. Clinton invited guests for after-dinner drinks on the balcony. Some headed home. Those who stayed quickly discovered that the weather had turned cold and blustery, and many wished they hadn't their checked coats.

—Walter Nicholls

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