

# Packing A PUNCH

BY JENNY WEBSTER JURICA | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF DON STRANGE OF TEXAS, INC.



PUNCH BOWLS ARE ABOUT AS SOUTHERN AS THEY COME AND — GET EXCITED — BECAUSE PUNCH BOWLS ARE MAKING A COMEBACK!

If you have spent any time in the South, chances are you have attended an event that featured a delicious spread of dainty finger sandwiches with the crusts cut off and butter-mints in an assortment of baby pinks, greens and yellows. The centerpiece of the spread was (undoubtedly) a silver or cut-glass punch bowl, holding a frothy, pastel-colored punch, made complete with impossibly precious matching punch cups (because every good Southern hostess has an antique punch bowl).

While punch bowls are ubiquitous among the Southern “shower” scene, the appeal of the communal vessel holding many spirited concoctions is just as popular today, coming full circle from its original intended use. According to David

Wondrich, author of the book, *Punch*, the festive beverage was first introduced in Europe in the 17th century when (legend has it that) a European, who was stationed in India with the British East India Company, wrote home about a beverage that he had experienced. This beverage, called by the Hindu word “*Panch*,” (which means “five”) reportedly symbolizes the five ingredients that make a good punch: citrus, spirits, sugar, water and spice.

Panch became the drink of choice in the midst of the British Indian Trade, when beer and wine were often hard to come by. In an effort to make their own wine, people began adding water, sugar, citrus and spices to alcoholic spirits. What followed was a beverage with a similar drinkability to wine, but with different variables and ingredients that could be customized to create a unique drink.

So, the concept of punch landed in England, where this communal beverage was well received and suddenly, punch and the punch bowls that held this new, irresistible beverage became the center of social events. Punch traveled

over to America with the first colonists, where silversmiths perfected the craft of creating intricate silver punch bowls for the wealthiest new Americans, and soon, punch was a staple of every respectable social function up and down the Eastern and Southern coasts.

Punch bowl enthusiast and collector, Di-Anna Arias first became enamored with punch bowls about 20 years ago.

Arias, who is the Vice President of Sales and Culinary Vision for Don Strange of Texas, Inc., was planning a brunch for a family in San Antonio at the family’s mid-century modern home. Arias and Don Strange were shopping at a vintage store when they saw a very unique mid-century punch bowl in the same color scheme as the event that they were planning. Arias fell in love with the set and it became the center-



ing up, we knew that it was a special day if the punch bowl set was getting cleaned for use,” remembers Arias.

When asked which punch bowl from her collection is her favorite, Arias struggled to whittle her collection down to just one beloved piece. But there are a few that hold a special place in Arias’ heart. Included in her short list is a beautiful punch bowl that was given to Arias from a dear friend’s mother. The mother presented the punch bowl set to Arias because she knew that Arias would appreciate it and keep it safe. Today, that punch bowl is a centerpiece in Arias’ office. “I smile every time I see that punch bowl in my office and think of the lovely parties and celebrations that it was a part of.”

Arias also has an Anchor Hocking Royal Ruby punch bowl set that belonged to a



piece of the mimosa station at this particular party. After the event, Mr. Strange gifted the punch bowl set to Arias, where today she proudly displays the set in her home.

Arias estimates that she now owns about 10 punch bowl sets. “The problem with 10 punch bowl sets is finding room to store 10 punch bowl sets,” laughs Arias.

While the mid-century punch bowl set holds a special place in her heart, it wasn’t Arias’ first punch bowl. Arias explained that her first punch bowl set was part of her “hope chest,” which is typically a piece of furniture (Arias’ was a cedar chest), used by unmarried women to collect household linens, clothing and heirlooms, in preparation for married life. “My grandmother created a hope chest for each of her granddaughters,” says Arias. “My hope chest, along with all of my cousins and sister, included a punch bowl set. My grandmother felt that a punch bowl set was a necessity.”

Arias recalls dreamy sherbet punch in hues of pink or mint green as a party staple during her childhood. “Grow-

special family member. The vibrant, rich red colored glass set makes it the perfect focal point for Valentine’s Day and for use during the holiday season.

If you are wondering to yourself, “*How would I ever make use of a punch bowl set in this day and age?*” rest assured that punch bowl sets can be used for far more than just punch. Arias suggests that, due to their sturdiness and ability to retain cold, silver punch bowls are great for filling with ice and chilling wine or champagne. Silver or glass punch bowls are also fabulous to use for floral arrangements and even as serving bowls for salads.

Arias has created many a festive punch in equally-festive punch bowls during her time at Don Strange Ranch and she remains just as ardent about the culture of punches and punch bowls as ever. “Having punches available to guests creates a wonderful time for people to visit around the punch bowls. Just the use of a punch bowl brings back so many wonderful memories and stories. I often overhear people saying, ‘*I’m going to get my punch bowl out and use it!*’” ♦