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Pink and perky

What do you cook for a low-key Sunday supper? If you're Zandra Rhodes it will be food with a pink theme for 16 friends

Interview by **Eva Wiseman**
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Zandra Rhodes in her kitchen. Photograph: Suki Dhanda

Zandra Rhodes stands in her kitchen, arms aloft. 'Potato, emmental, nutmeg, cream. Brilliant. Who wants more wine?' She's a designer, an artist, a 67-year-old hair-dye enthusiast, and, it turns out, the best hostess in the world.

Tonight, a gloomy Sunday evening in Bermondsey, south London, Rhodes is celebrating. She divides her time between Bermondsey and San Diego, California, where she lives with her partner, the ex-president of Warner Brothers. In London this month, Aida returns to the Coliseum with Rhodes's Egyptian-inspired designs - grand, painted pyramids, pleated gold gowns and a magnificent archway in the shape of a half-clothed bending figure. She's gathered her friends - fashion editors, performance artists, film-makers - to toast the show, with cava and delight.

Guests trickle in from 7.30pm, coming up from her Fashion and Textile Museum on the ground floor (the lift talks to you in a Northern accent) to her penthouse flat, which smells sweetly of melting cheese. Rhodes directs proceedings. Her three assistants, Polly, Jennifer and Kitty, who live in her flat and work in her studio, and adore her, stir a comically large pan of peas. 'Kitty!' Rhodes squeals at 15-minute intervals. 'Kitty! Help!' Calmly, Kitty, 21, attends, smiling. She chills the wine, lights the candles, puts Lou Reed on the hi-fi, and glides across the rainbow-coloured floor like she's on ice.

The long room is surrounded by a patio, where Rhodes grows pink heather, peonies and a little Christmas tree that they've kept alive all year, watched over by a huge golden Buddha. 'It's polystyrene,' she says. 'Touch it!'

Inside, a large table is set with heavy square ceramic plates and littered with pebbles, like sparkling flotsam. A weighty chandelier, by her best friend, 63-year-old sculptor Andrew Logan, hangs above a smaller table, where Rhodes perches to sketch out a

seating plan on the cover of an old Observer Magazine. Ornamental screens hide rails of her chiffon dresses, and mannequins pose by the windows. It all gives the impression of being quite temporary, like the dressing room backstage at a particularly lively school play.

The kitchen looks out to Tower Bridge. Outside the loo is a framed photograph of Princess Diana in an original Zandra Rhodes creation. By the stairs are vases of plastic flowers, Rhodes's Emmy for the costume design of *Romeo and Juliet on Ice*, and a sparkling bust of her, a birthday present from Logan, the twin of which is in the National Portrait Gallery. He arrives early-ish. 'We should do more disco evenings,' he suggests to Kitty. 'One must dance.'

Rhodes offers drinks, takes coats and, as she talks me through the menu, ties a wipe-clean Zandra Rhodes-branded apron around her waist. 'I'm doing English comfort food, with a pink theme,' she says, hands outstretched, turquoise nails flashing. 'First we're having borscht, with a dollop of Mexican salsa, then potato dauphinois with peas and a pomegranate salad, and then stewed plums with raspberry-ripple ice cream. More wine? Yes, more wine.'

She adds another carton of double cream to the potatoes ('Zandra is obsessed with double cream,' whispers Jennifer) and ushers her guests to their seats, where Aida place cards position them next to strangers. The borscht is birthmark-pink and is served to a soundtrack of André 3000 and David Bowie, 'but if I was choosing the music it'd probably be The Archers,' says Rhodes.

Post-borscht, guests line up noisily to help themselves to potato, piling their used bowls on the 'coffee table': two huge trunks covered in fabric and labelled 'Yarn'. In the sink beyond them, a pile of lemons and flowers wait to be composted, and an arrangement of kiwi fruits rests on a cake stand. Rhodes flits between friends. 'I love this,' she says. 'I love designing the table, and putting people together. And I love eating, of course. I give dinner parties every weekend I'm in London because it's how I see my friends. I've had a couple of disasters though. Once I dropped a whole salmon on the floor. I didn't tell anyone. Another night Mo Mowlam locked herself in the toilet by accident, and we thought she had run away.'

She skips towards the table where her friend is thirsty, and, singing along to Bowie ('Oh you pretty things!') pours him a drink while balancing on one silver-clad leg. Reflected in the window, she looks like a Christmas-tree fairy and, through the glass, London appears especially dull.

• Aida is at the London Coliseum, 20 and 22 November at 7.30pm; 0871 911 0200; eno.org/operaguide