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KARLA DASCAL: ‘Yeah, Basel was a lot. But I feel more fulfilled than tired,’ events planner says.

LUNCH WITH LYDIA

How a go-to gal gets it done

Art Basel and its gazillion glitzy parties are finally over and you’re on the phone with events planner Karla Dascal, a woman who should be flat on her back eating bonbons this week, but instead is at the office “checking tons and tons of e-mails.”

If anybody is entitled to whine about a back-breaking Basel schedule (and so many are) it’s Dascal, Miami’s premier party architect, whose company handled everything from putting

together the VVIP gift baskets the highest profile Baselgoers received upon arrival (beach towels, bubbly, MAC Cosmetics and other stuff from official sponsors of the art fair), to the installation of the Swarovski Crystal Palace, which filled South

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Events planner made Basel seem like a breeze



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SHE'S GOT GAME, TOO: Karla Dascal will be turning her events space in Wynwood into a hospitality center during Super Bowl week.

*DASCAL, FROM 1M

Beach's Paris Theater with glittery designer chandeliers, to endless glam dinners (on the rooftop of Miami Art Central, atop the ponds at the Setai Hotel, in a tent in front of the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, in the outlandish ballroom attached to a private home on Miami Beach.)

"Did I survive? Of course I survived," Dascal says in her usual composed tone.

Here is a party producer who never overstates. Like her events, which can cost into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, she prefers to give off Cool and Simple.

"Yeah, Basel was a lot. But I feel more fulfilled than tired. Plus tomorrow I have a big event on Fisher Island. And then there's the holidays, New Year's. After that,

Super Bowl," says Dascal, who unlike her counterparts in the business, seems never keyed up.

Dascal says she'll be turning her own sleek events space, in a renovated warehouse on dicey 25th Street in Wynwood — it has hosted some of Miami's highest-end weddings, bat mitzvahs and corporate bashes — into a Reebok hospitality center where football players and celebs will come for gifts and parties during Super Bowl week.

"What I love about The Space (what she calls the former warehouse, turned into a minimalist temple with backlit acrylic walls and shiny epoxy floors by architect Rene Gonzalez, who won an award from the American Institute of Architects for the job) is that in can be transformed into anything. Another party we did during Basel was here, the introduction of the new Lladró line.

"All their people from Spain came. We did a black-and-white theme with a chandelier with porcelain butterflies, by Lladró of course, suspended in the middle of the space. Plus we had all their knick-knacks."

You have to coax her to tell you even that much. Dascal, 36, a Cuban-American who came up privileged (her dad Charles is a banker and auto dealer, her mom Fanny a socialite), doesn't go on and on about herself, her parties, her way with Lucite and lighting and yuca cane.

When you have lunch at the Charcuterie near the Design District a few weeks prior to Basel, she steers clear of her private life and downplays how many high-profile events she has been signed to produce during the art fair. Not that there isn't a certain warmth to her, just that she's not going to do something as unseemly as gab about herself.

"Yeah. I'm always pretty busy during Basel," she tells you, but she doesn't gush about the details. "I really enjoy those events because it's a crowd that really understands design."

And Dascal, who studied architecture and design before quitting to start a flower arranging business, which grew into the party production business, is most interested in design. Which is why her events are uniquely Karla. It's in the details, the transparent Philippe Starck chairs she'll use at a dinner, the big glowing rectangles that serve as bars at a cocktail bar, the dramatic draping of white curtains here, the unexpected sleek lounge vignette there.

"With Karla, the overriding ges-

ture is everywhere," says Gonzalez. "It's in everything from the table setting to the floral arrangements to the bars to the backdrops. It can be minimalist and it can be baroque, but what is clear is the attention to detail and the fact that all of it has a contemporary sensibility."

"You know a Karla event immediately because it's very tailored. Very clean, very trimmed," says Alejandro Mugerza, of Le Basque Catering, Miami's most upscale Spanish-influenced caterer. This Basel, they worked together on the rooftop dinner at MAC, the Goldman Sachs dinner at cifo and the Sotheby's dinner at MOCA.

"We work so much together that we have telepathy," says Mugerza. "At other events, things can look disjointed because the decor has nothing to do with the food or with the sort of tray the waiter is carrying. But we can put both sides together in a way that is seamless. Karla can go from classic to contemporary and still be very clean. Which is why she is the only events producer that I use. Those yuca cane arrangements at MAC, they were madness, they were magnificent."

Exactly the sort of words that would never come out of Karla's mouth.

Here she is explaining how she handled the private dinner hosted by Nadja Swarovski at the Setai during Basel: "We had a clear tent that sat on a platform over the pond. We used smoke-colored Lucite tables with these lighted glitter boxes that ran down the tables. Everything was black and smoke. I think it was nice."

Dascal, who grew up on Miami

Beach, had a friend whose dad was in the flower importing business. He would bring spectacular roses from Ecuador that Dascal would take home to her mom and arrange for her. Her mom's friends so loved them, Dascal began delivering boxes to them, 125 long stems for \$125.

"They were gorgeous roses. Very large heads, very clean stems, very long life span. They would open to perfection. My mom's friends freaked out over them."

Eventually, Roses by Karla took off and Dascal moved into a space in Little Havana that her father owned. But she paid the going rent.

"I didn't want him to just give it to me. I mean, what's the joke in having everything just given to you? He did help. He did make a van accessible somewhere down the line. But I wanted to do it on my own," says Dascal, whose floral delivery business is still going strong. Among regular clients are boutiques such as Donald Pliner and Diane Von Furstenberg and hotels like the Ritz-Carlton and the Mandarin Oriental.

"I think of flower arranging the way I think of couture," says Dascal. "It has to be elegant. I'll never be over roses, they're very lush and very sexy. But burgundy peonies from New Zealand are amazing."

So what's cheesy? "Anything overdone is cheesy. At an event, a lot of backdrops, a lot of construction, a lot of anything. Anything where the theme overwhelms."

So say she was throwing a party and the theme was Hialeah Banquet Hall. What would she do?

"I would rent a place in Hialeah. And I would leave it alone."