

Having a swell time

Caterer Jackson Gilmour organised the Australia Day gala dinner for the fourth successive year. MD **Anne Aitken** explains how her team kept the mood buoyant



This event was meticulously planned with Australia Day Foundation event co-ordinator Judy Cooper, as was the case in previous years. This year we wanted a theme that would bring a taste of Australia to London so we decided to go for Australia House, which is situated

on the corner of the Strand and Aldwych. This provided a huge challenge because we had to create our own kitchen in the reception area of the Australia Centre at the rear of the building.

As 2007 is the year of the Australian surf lifesaver, and with beach life and surfing being such a part of Australian culture, we felt that this would be a great starting point. It gave us a bold palette of vibrant colours and a great range of potential props.

Guests were encouraged to enter into the spirit of the evening when waiters, dressed as surf lifesavers, greeted them with champagne and Australian chef Shane Osborn's fabulous canapés. Osborn is co-owner of the two Michelin-starred Pied à Terre on Charlotte Street. He was a delight to work with and I think we learned a lot from him – and perhaps vice versa. It is important to establish a strong relationship when you are working with an executive chef as well as your own master chef, in this case Joyce O'Hagan.

The beach theme was extended into the drinks and dancing area where the centrepiece was a bar created from a huge aquarium full of tropical fish and topped with a surfboard designed by Kate Viner.

Dinner was served in the ballroom for 285 guests who included the Australian high commissioner the Hon



Richard Alston. The menu included chilled pumpkin and ginger soup, scallop ceviche with sesame filo, avocado and crème fraiche purée, roasted rump of Australian beef with a warm salad of wild mushrooms artichokes and green beans, followed by mango rice pudding, coconut mousse and Anzac biscuits.

We continued the sunshine and surfer theme onto the tables to keep the mood bright and buoyant.

Jones Hire supplied the majority of our equipment but we also commissioned aquamarine organza tablecloths from Speciality Linen, and used a daring mix of lime green crockery from Top Table.

The evening proved to be a great success and was thoroughly enjoyed by all the guests. Even the after-dinner entertainment, led by world-renowned Australian cabaret singer Robyn Archer, kept the mood of the event lively, fun and glamorous, which was perfect for the occasion and complemented what we were trying to achieve.



The beach-life theme ran throughout the event (above) while the entertainment (left) blended glamour with fun and frivolity

