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SECRET AGENT MEN: Windows and Laurent Lhuillier will create inaugural masterpieces under watchful eyes.

Protect and Serve

Inaugural catering is hardly a piece of cake. By [Name] | Photography by Patrick King |

If you think you're going to have it tough maneuvering around the Capitol on Inauguration Day, just be glad you don't have to fend the masses. Top local caterers don't only have to worry about preparing canapés and presentation items—they have to navigate the rigid security surrounding Obama's inauguration, which means jumping through hoops unimaginable to most party planners.

Six managers and catering teams met with the U.S. Secret Service weeks before this month's hall-a-palooza and staffers and servers have all been vetted to gain the appropriate security clearances. "The Secret Service sets the schedule for the day," says Susan Lacz, CEO of Ridgewell Catering (ridgewell.com), which has been working inaugurations since 1993. Security forces dictate the catering timeline by defining when a building will be cleared out for a full-scale safety check. "It's a backwards from when they are doing the sweep," Lacz explains. "It's methodical when you're talking about protecting the President."

With the 15-minute-zero hour in place, the race begins to get essential ingredients for an affair into the site. Knowing that the streets will be blocked off more than 24 hours before the event, some outfitters, such as Windows Catering (catering.com), begin bringing in supplies as early as the Friday before the night event. "That includes refrigeration units and every piece of china, flatware and linens," says Andrew Germino, Windows president. And that's not the minutiae. All of the Windows chefs are sending their knives to the site the night before, making sure they are sharp and ready to go through the magnetometers on the day of the event. "We make sure we don't have the need for anything that we don't have the need for," says Patrick de Pae of 42nd Street Catering. "There's a lot of things that we don't have the need for."

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“ **Chef Lhuillier creates inaugural masterpieces...**

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