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Astrid Stawiarz for The Wall Street Journal

'Dîner en Blanc' picnickers outside the World Financial Center's Winter Garden.

By [LIZZIE SIMON](#)

On Thursday night, more than 1,100 white-wearing, chic picnickers convened outside the Winter Garden at the World Financial Center for the first ever New York "Dîner en Blanc" (Dinner in White), an event previously enjoyed by thousands of flash feasters in cities like Paris (natch), Amsterdam, Berlin and Zurich. The waiting list for the event exceeded 30,000.

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Peter Laird and Allison Leader

Guests didn't know where the dinner would be held. Instead, they were clumped in groups and assigned various meeting spots across lower Manhattan, where a list-carrying leader was in charge of marching them to a secret location.

At the corner of Broadway and Murray just before 7 p.m., one such group of about 50 stylish shleppers set off across town lugging cutlery, chairs, wine glasses, tables, tablecloths, electric candles, and fresh flowers, having agreed to pack it all back up respectfully by the end of the evening. Some brought dinner; others planned to purchase a picnic basket's worth on site.



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Michelle Coursey and Matthew Karl Gale



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Sophie Garcia and Ann Nguyen bring pixie dust to the picnic.

Jared Longhitano, a 35-year-old trader, carried a foldup table over his head, his forehead beading up in sweat. "Are there any showers in this place?" he asked.

Earlier in the day it had rained. Many guests, not knowing that the ground beneath them would be concrete, worried that a *fleuve de boue* (river of mud) would force them to be *embourbé* (mired) in mud, proving that everything really does sound better in French.

As the crowd crossed Greenwich Street, it was joined by more than a hundred revelers, and, at West Street, several hundred more tagged along. Upon arrival, the group perplexed the outdoor cocktail crowd at P.J. Clarke's.

The sun set against the New Jersey skyline and a dozen sitting sailboats bobbed in the harbor wind. "I thought this would be contrived fun," said 36-year-old Elisha Goldberg, who works in finance, "but it's really, actually fun."

Event designer Mark Addison, 42, said, "It's up to the guests to design it, which is brilliant."

After setting up, Maya Hadded, 29, and Steve Miller, 46, who co-own a restaurant, Silver Platter, said they'd prepared "like a tornado" for the event, and were enjoying tuna tartar they'd assembled on a tower of tomato and avocado. "Life is good," said Mr. Miller.

Even the glassware fit the theme.



Allison Leader, a 26-year-old public-relations representative, said that "chasing down the white stuff" to wear at the end of August wasn't easy. "This is a city where everybody wears black," said her date, 26-year-old consultant Peter Laird.

Lauren Burns, 25, who works at Citigroup, and her date skipped the picnic basket and brought their own dinner. "We decided to put it together ourselves," she said, which "took a walk in the rain to Whole Foods."

But they didn't spend any time in the kitchen? "No!" she said. "No."

François Pasquier organized the first event in Paris in 1988. His son, Aymeric, 37, has since taken the helm. The event wasn't without glitches—one, in the computer system, had resulted in over selling hundreds of spots, which then had to be refunded. And by 8 p.m the wine ran out and a line of about a hundred people waited soberly for more to be delivered.

Asked to reflect on the difference in staging the dinner in New York, he said that people work more here and are accustomed to paying for having everything arranged for them. But with Dîner en Blanc, "You spend a lot of time to prepare—hours, even weeks. But then people are so happy to deserve their dinner and their night."

Also, he said, "Men wear white shoes here. Parisian men never do that."