

## 9 Table plan and place cards

When a dinner is given in a diplomatic or official residence, a table plan is displayed in a prominent location, usually at the entrance. In this diagram, the host and hostess are seated at each end of the table or facing each other at the centre. The entrance to the dining room is usually clearly indicated. Guests should locate their places at table in relation to the entrance so as to be able to find them easily when the time comes. It is useful to take note of the names of one's neighbours on either side, to avoid having to peer at the cards placed before them on the table\*. (Place-cards, incidentally, should be handwritten.)

## 10 Order of precedence

Precedence is determined first by rank; ambassadors accordingly come before *chargés d'affaires*, *ad interim*; then come ministers, counsellors, secretaries, and so on. Among persons of equivalent rank, precedence is determined by the date of arrival at one's post. Thus the ambassador whose arrival dates back the furthest occupies a higher place at a diplomatic reception than one more recently arrived.

In all social activities at the post, a wife is accorded, as a courtesy, the same precedence as her husband, or *vice versa* as the case may be. The Office of Protocol of the receiving country has a complete list of the diplomatic corps and can answer any inquiries as to the order of precedence of the dignitaries and members of the government of the country. The most senior of the ambassadors is called the dean of the diplomatic corps, except in countries where the dean is traditionally the apostolic delegate. The dean usually represents the corps as a whole at official ceremonies in the capital.

The usual rule, at a meal, is that the wife of the highest-ranking guest is seated at the host's right, and the highest-ranking guest at the right of the hostess. The second place is to the left of the host and the hostess, and so on.

## CONCLUSION

If in doubt as to questions of protocol when entertaining or attending official functions, it is better to make inquiries than to commit a *faux pas*. Information can always be obtained, either at the mission — usually from the secretary to the head of mission — or directly from the Office of

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\* Examples of table plans will be found in *Manuel pratique de protocole* by Jean Serres.