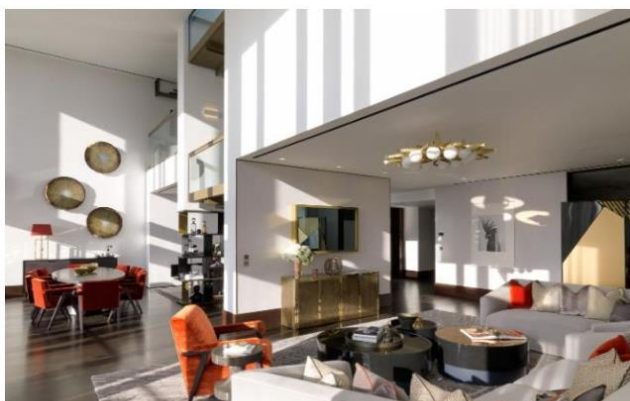


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How to create the perfect entertaining space



Kings Gate Penthouse

By **Emily Brooks**

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A home bar used to be a sign of naffness, whether it was a Del Boy-style fake-leather number topped with kitsch pineapple ice-bucket or an elaborate, built-in, Victorian-style timber confection that wouldn't look out of place in your local pub. But the bar is back, taking its design cues this time from New York rather than the Nag's Head.

Take the apartment that Helen Green Design has recently unveiled at The King's Library, an Edwardian school conversion in Chelsea, where a whole room is given over specifically to entertaining. It includes an oval bar, backed by a wall of hand-painted glass, that wouldn't be out of place in an opulent small hotel.

Halstock, the bespoke joinery company, reports a rise in demand for compact built-in bar cabinets. Senior designer Paul Walton says they are "characterised by unusual and beautiful veneers, mirror, metal and stone detailing, all of which promote luxury and glamour and the indulgence of serving cocktails."



Niloufar Bakhtiar-Bakhtiari's home

The comeback of the home bar is part of a wider trend – almost an infatuation – with entertaining: more and more luxury homes are specifically designed around not their inhabitants but their potential guests.

“The higher-end the project, the more likely it is that tailoring space for entertaining will be part of the brief,” says Alex Isaac, head of design at interior design studio Morpheus. “We’re putting in a lot of secondary kitchens – so there’s a show kitchen next to a professional kitchen with catering-level appliances, perhaps with its own separate entrance.”

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The type of guests people are hosting has also changed. “People now use their houses as a business tool, so they’re also asking for formal entertaining space where they can bring in a potential business partner – somewhere you might sit with a whisky and broker the next deal,” Isaac says.

And with this comes the resurrection of the home bar – multiple bars, in fact, so you can mingle all over the house. “There might be one by the pool that’s more child-

friendly, and another one in a formal drawing room where you’d entertain a colleague.”



The King's Library in Chelsea

While it may be relatively straightforward to incorporate a small entertaining space for a businesslike tête-à-tête, it's harder to combine an intimate home suitable for everyday living with a big open space for a few dozen partygoers.

Interior designer Natalia Miyar regularly has to find that balance: "Our brief is often as much about having guests over as it is about family living. But people who entertain today aren't generally doing a formal dinner for 25 people, so you don't need a large dining space. Instead you want lots of seating areas with breakout space to allow for the natural social dynamics. Very rarely are 10 people sitting in a big circle and talking; it's smaller groups of three or four, max."

Sammy Wickens, who designed Helen Green Design's King's Library apartment, has also noticed that "the location of the entertaining zone has shifted over the past few decades, from formal dining rooms to a more relaxed open-plan kitchen-dining area."

If it isn't full of caterers or serving staff, the kitchen is the primary entertaining space, with large islands and bar stools. "The breakfast bar has become increasingly important, and the space can double as an area where guests can sit and enjoy the company of the host while cooking," Wickens says.

Katherine Neathercoat, head of interiors at Rolfe Judd, makes these open-plan spaces as streamlined as possible so that the kitchen looks its best for guests. She recently worked on two apartments in Dukelease's Artisan development in Fitzrovia, where she created clear sightlines between different zones and made the open-plan kitchens look "fuss-free".

"We try and make the furniture layouts as open as possible, so if you've got people cooking and others sitting on sofas, you can communicate between the two," Neathercoat says. "I also wanted to give people the opportunity to hide TVs and other everyday paraphernalia, so if you wanted a clean-looking entertaining space everything was cleverly tucked away. It's as practical as possible while maintaining the wow-factor."



Spiral glass trolley £263, by Sweetpea & Willow (sweetpeaandwillow.com)

At Artisan, Neathercoat has also tried to bring some flexibility to the layout of the home, so it can quickly go from practical to party. For example, a guest bedroom has its en suite in an ante-lobby, separated with sets of sliding pocket doors; it can function as a regular en suite for overnight guests or a lobby cloakroom during a party.

At architecture and interiors firm SHH, associate director Rupert Martineau regularly employs hidden sliding doors as a device for making entertaining easier. They can be opened to accommodate lots of guests or, for a smaller group, can be used to create intimacy and hide the mess at the same time.

“If you’ve got a few friends over, you’re happy to gather around the kitchen island, but when you’re sitting down for dinner you want to be able to screen off the kitchen until the morning after.”

Spinocchia Freund’s penthouse apartment for Land Securities’ Kings Gate building in London’s Victoria offers a good example of the kind of layout that wealthy, sociable buyers are looking for. The open-plan ground floor has several different seating areas. In the main area, a pair of sofas are set at an angle to enclose their occupants.



Puccini cocktail cabinet £1999 by John Lewis johnlewis.com

This is the perfect set-up for groups, says Spinocchia Freund's design director Lauren Wood. "Curved sofas are real conversation clusters, and people can still pull up a chair and join in. That idea of two smaller sofas facing each other with a coffee table in between can feel a bit formal." The oval dining table seats 10.

"We always try to cater for as many guests as we can, up to a point where it still looks right for the available space," says Wood. "You don't want it to look like a wedding reception."

Open-plan spaces that can be partitioned off are a great way to make your home more entertaining-friendly if you're renovating or extending, but even if you're not, there are smaller details that might be easier to incorporate.



Alba decanter from £72 by Joe Doucet nudeglass.com

Designer Niloufar Bakhtiar-Bakhtiari suggests selecting portable furniture that can easily be reconfigured for parties and choosing fabrics that have good acoustic properties. Her own home features a bar area with a leather floor, as well as upholstered doors, giving an intimate, cocooning quality to the room.

Anyone can create lighting that flatters guests and creates the right ambience. “It’s always effective to have a beautiful centrepiece to give your entertainment space a wow-factor, with hidden, non-direct lighting to create subtle moods,” says designer Dara Huang of Design Haus Liberty. “Have all of your lights on dimmers so you can change the atmosphere as the event goes on.”

If you want to start small, buy one of the wheeled bar-carts that are now back in fashion. No need to install your own cocktail cabinet – the party goes wherever you go.