A grand foyer designed to generously allow guests to enjoy any event.

PHOTO BY TIM LEE

BY **STEVE HAAS**

ENTERTAINING GRANDLY

You can tailor elements of your home's design (the "flow" of people during parties, the technology you install, your décor and furniture layout) to make entertaining easier and more rewarding

In ancient Rome (one of the first societies in which affluent people entertained lavishly in their homes), a decent banquet featured an extravagance of food, entertainment between each course, and a literary performance after dinner. The wealthier Romans had homes designed especially for impressive entertaining, with multiple dining rooms built around outdoor courtyards that served as reception areas.

No doubt the Romans held parties for reasons both benign (sociability) and egotistical (the desire to dazzle). As citizens of a conquering nation, members of the Roman upper class were insatiable collectors, and parties gave them a chance to show off their treasures. Here in America, we have our own reasons. Sociability, of course, is one—the desire to hold weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs, and birthday, anniversary, and holiday celebrations in the setting we find most comfortable. Civic virtue is another—opening our homes for charitable functions and political gatherings. Sometimes there's the need to use a private home for a business function. And sometimes there just might be the desire to impress.

Many modern homeowners go to great lengths to ensure that their home is designed for hosting memorable celebrations. A couple in New Jersey just finished a 32,000-square-foot residence with a magnificent ballroom as the centerpiece. "It's the thrill of socializing in our own home, and knowing that we have complete control over how our events are planned,

Above: Black and white sesame–encrusted sashimi -grade tuna bits on quills, with an "inkwell" of wasabi mayonnaise, served at a book-launch party at a private home in Rye, New York.

PHOTO BY LIZ SECCURO

that makes it so much better than going to a sterile banquet hall," they say. "Sure there's a chance that something might get damaged or stolen, but we try to be very selective about whom we invite and not worry too much about the rare accident."

Savvy homeowners factor their entertainment style into the design, construction, or remodeling of their residence. Irene Ioffe, of R.S. Granoff Architects, notes that at least 75 percent of her firm's residential clients entertain on a regular basis. "We make it a point, at the very beginning of our design process, to conduct what we call a lifestyle interview with our clients," Ioffe says. "One of the most crucial things we need to know is how our clients expect to entertain."

From the information gathered in such an interview, an architect can tailor elements in

Above: two decorative trays, one of cumin chicken and one of champagne and mango purée. **Right and opposite page:** When a home is designed with entertaining in mind, all the public rooms flow into one another. Here, guests feast on hors d'oeuvre from Plum Pure Foods, of Cos Cob, served in sterling silver from S. Wyler, of Greenwich.

PHOTOS: MISSY MCLAMB (APPETIZERS); TIM LEE (DINNER PARTY AND MUSICIANS)

Left: Talented instrumentalists, like this chamber ensemble, provided by Greenwich Music, bring warmth and spirit to a private gathering in the home.

RESONANCE

Live music has been providing effervescence, sublimity, joy—or, at the very least, welcome distraction—at parties in the home for thousands of years. The entertainers have included singers and kithara players at Roman banquets, chamber ensembles in eighteenth-century drawing rooms, earnest vocalists in Victorian parlors, ragtime piano players in early 20th-century living rooms—and the guests themselves (there was plenty of singing 'round the piano up until the 1950s or '60s).

Now, lamentably, partygoers encounter far less live entertainment on special occasions than they used to: The jazz pianist, the quartet rendering Mozart, the doo-woppers and barbershoppers and rock bands and rhythm-and-blues vocalists, have been eclipsed (though hardly equaled!) by TiVo boxes and surround-sound systems. Nevertheless, many of us still consider live music the most engaging part of a soiree. What can musically compare to listening to a talented instrumentalist or vocalist in an intimate setting?.

But even those contemporary hosts who do engage musicians to perform at their parties (or who perform themselves) run into a common difficulty: In most cases, home entertaining spaces—living rooms, great rooms, recreation rooms, etc.—produce sound that is dead or that echoes uncontrollably. Even if a room is conducive to one type of music, it may not be suitable for another: Classical music may sound fine in the living room, but put a contemporary band in there and the result will be ear-splitting cacophony.

As an acoustical designer I have spent the last decade finding ways to control and enhance sound in the luxury home environment. My work alerted me to homeowners' need for influence over the sound of the music in their entertainment spaces—control that goes beyond traditional approaches (taming noise with sound-absorbing materials that blend well aesthetically). I developed an acoustic-enhancement system, Concertino, that electronically changes the acoustics of a space in a way that provides the signature sound of a concert hall, jazz club, cathedral, or just about any other imaginable venue.

Concertino is not an amplification system that alters the sound of live music before you even hear it. Rather, it allows the sound from any source (a cellist, a vocalist, or even that audience member coughing in the eighth row) to be heard unaltered, then followed seamlessly by all of the carefully crafted sound reflections and reverberations that a real hall would provide.

To accomplish this, I use a proprietary processor that interfaces with a multitude of microphones and speakers in the walls and ceiling of the room; they listen to each sound, instantaneously enhance it, and then deliver it back into the room in a manner that blends precisely with the direct sound from the source. (All of these components are nearly—sometimes totally—invisible.)

The result is a natural-sounding acoustic environment optimized with a simple press of a button for a wide variety of spoken-word or live-music applications, including chamber orchestras, jazz combos, popular bands, poetry readings, and much more. With Concertino, hosts can turn their living room into a setting worthy of a concert by a local string quartet, a jazz trio, Yo-Yo Ma, or even Bruce Springsteen.

—Steve Haas

Interview potential event planners in your home, where they can assess your taste, your style, your needs. It's *your* style that matters. If a planner tries to foist his or her style on you, move on.

Above, left: A Moroccan-themed bat mitzvah on a shorefront estate in Greenwich featured—to summon a "rock the Casbah" feeling—colorful apple-green and turquoise silk dupioni cloths, cushions, and hand-piped ottomans; trees with hand-threaded mango orchid blossoms; and brass market lanterns. **Above, right:** A table set in a tent on a farm in Millbrook, Connecticut, sets the stage for a South African feast, featuring leather chargers, gold-rimmed stemware, and grasshoppers, handmade from palm, jauntily awaiting formal place cards. **Opposite page:** Guests always enjoy gathering around a cozy fire in an intimate setting

the home's design to make entertaining easier. It's important to define the "flow" of the house. Corridors and doorways need to be wide enough to accommodate large groups of people circulating during parties. The spaces likely to hold the majority of the guests should be easily grouped off the main entrance, while the residence's design should maintain some physical separation of the more private areas of the home.

Other issues that architects and their engineering teams consider when they know their client likes to entertain include parking, security, acoustics, kitchen and bar layouts, lighting, power, HVAC, and the connection between indoor and outdoor spaces used for entertaining.

Notes one Westport homeowner, "Our home design allows us to host parties both inside and outside for up to 200 guests. If we hadn't found a house that had a natural flow from the great room out to the terrace area, it might have been much more difficult to make this happen."

Jim Blansfield, of Blansfield Builders, points out, "Even though there are a limited amount of days in the year that one can effectively host a party in the Northeast, this certainly does not prevent homeowners from asking their designers and builders to include elaborate landscaping and substantial accommodations for entertaining outside." Designers can make sure that cooking and serving facilities are available both indoors and outdoors; convenient power receptacles and distributed audio are also very common needs. Landscape architects can be brought in to create ideal exterior settings for social gatherings—botanical gardens, elaborate pools,

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PHOTOS: SHAWN EHLERS (MOROCCAN PARTY); MISSY MCLAMB (TABLE SETTING); TIM LEE (FIREPLACE)

Don't try, with one event, to pay back everyone who has recently invited you to dinner or cocktail parties. It's better to give several parties than one huge open house. People want to feel special and pampered.

A spectacular great room is the jewel in the crown for many luxury homeowners, providing a dynamic backdrop for entertaining grandly. The stunning white silk floral arrangement (opposite page) is from the Silk Touch, of Norwalk, Connecticut.

PHOTO BY TIM LEE

DETAILS, DETAILS

Sometimes the arrangements for an upcoming event are so complex, or you are so determined to be part of the party and not a stressed-out automaton, that you need to turn to an event planner. (Caterers and floral designers are not event planners. They can recommend other vendors, of course, but you really do need a true event planner to pull the whole thing together.)

My years as a planner (for Dolce Parties) have taught me that potential planners should be interviewed in the home, where they can assess your taste, your style, your needs. It's ***your*** style that matters: If a planner tries to foist his or her style upon you, it's time to move on.

But even if you cannot exactly define your vision, a great planner should be able to figure it out—even based on one tiny element. Show your planner photographs of things that move you— a piece of furniture, food, a type of flower, a piece of stationery. (Sometimes it's easier to know what you don't want than what you do want.)

Here are some guidelines that I've given my clients over the years:

■ Do not attempt, with one event, to pay back all of the people who have recently invited you to dinner or cocktail parties. It's better to give several parties than one huge open house. People want to feel special and pampered.

■ Consider whether you want the cooking to be theater or not: Do you want your caterer to cook in your kitchen, the garage, a tent off the back of the house? Some people love to watch chefs cook indoors, and some don't.

■ Think of spaces beyond the dining room and living room as settings for your party. Use the wine cellar, the media room, the pool house. Consider tenting your gardens.

■ Don't forget to order coat racks and hangers from the rental shop. Nothing is tackier than laying coats out in a bedroom or study.

■ Always have a timeline in mind as you plan—I do with every party—so there is a definite flow: arrival, coat checking, serving drinks, dinner, entertainment, lighting candles, presenting cake, handing out gift bags, departure. Include in your timeline the arrival times and delivery times for the caterer, rentals, the cake, the entertainment, etc.

■ Favors—no matter how small—are a must. Dolce Parties sends guests home with monogrammed hand towels, scented candles, organic pancake mix, or CDs of our favorite tracks.

■ I adore using square and family-style tables. Round gets boring. As for married couples, splitting couples up is de rigueur unless they're still sporting tans from their St. Barts honeymoon. After all, spouses can have dinner with each other for the rest of their life, and separating them adds to the conversational sparkle. And what spouse doesn't like to innocently flirt with someone else, anyway?

When it comes to themes, let's face it—"Casino Night" and "Carnivale" are beyond hackneyed. You might try some of these—

■ a luxe clambake, white tablecloths, great wines, great music
■ a real Southern barbecue party
■ a Kentucky Derby party
■ an upscale family picnic, individual hampers for guests, monogrammed totes, favors, etc., a twist on the typical late-summer family reunion
■ a lobster feast
■ a Labor Day hangover brunch
■ a surfing party
■ a "We're Renovating" hardhat party (you can have a party no matter what condition the house is in)
■ a couples' bridal shower for serious food and wine aficionados
■ a puppy birthday party (no kidding—guests and dogs)
■ a surprise anything (it's been done)
■ an Intimate Dinner to Introduce (insert new designer, author, artist, celebrity, pediatrician) to Town
■ a fashion show luncheon by the pool
■ a polo luncheon
■ Dinner in the Kitchen with a Celebrity Chef
■ a girls-only pajama party (grownup girls, that is)
■ a sailing soiree
■ a Bastille Day bash
■ a Summer Solstice party
■ a daytime pool and cabana party (this means you all swim!)—great if you have a pool house

—Liz Securro

Liz Securro, creative director of Dolce Parties, has executed events for "presidents, Oscar winners, corporate titans, and over 300 brides," she writes. The events have included dinners, drinks parties, product launches, movie premieres, bar/bat mitzvahs, baby showers, and, of course, weddings—not only in the New York City area, but across the U.S. and abroad.
203.622.3114; www.dolceparties.com

Top, left: A sparkling (and surprise) 20-minute display of fireworks over Long Island Sound was a gift from this groom to his bride at their estate wedding in Old Greenwich. **Top, right:** A sunset dinner under the trees at a grand Hamptons estate. The white linens, mahogany Chiavari chairs, and hanging lanterns make a simple yet powerful design statement. **Above:** Conga drummers led the guests by the light of tiki torchieres from cocktails by the pool to a dinner tent bedecked with campaign tables, skin rugs, leather ottoman and African trees for this South African themed formal dinner.

PHOTOS BY MISSY MCLAMB

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and even small golf courses on estate properties.

Interior designers also play a big part in ensuring that the infrastructure, furniture layout, and décor all complement their client's entertainment style. Their jobs don't necessarily end when the home is completed. Victoria Vandamm, of Vandamm Interiors, explains: "Most of our clients have very strong expectations when they're planning a major event in their home. Once we have designed the more permanent interior look of the home, we also end up helping them on an ongoing basis to customize their home to suit a specific function. From bringing in unique art pieces and furniture to ensuring that the lighting is set to accent the public areas in just the appropriate way, we find no detail too small to overlook in order to make the guests have the best time possible." (Some details are acts of kindness, like ensuring that air filters are cleaned right before an event, in case one of the guests is extremely sensitive to allergens.)

Up-to-date technology will add greatly to your ability to entertain grandly. Forward-looking homeowners have the appropriate technical systems installed during the home's construction. During—and even after—construction, a technology integrator like Alex Sulpizi, of Amnet Systems [see his article on page 75], can ensure that the audio, video, HVAC, security, and lighting in your home is set up appropriately for each event. "Some homeowners even want us to display slide

shows of digital pictures on plasma screens located around the home to enhance the theme of the event," Sulpizi notes.

Besides the ballrooms, home theaters, billiard rooms, libraries, and outdoor terraces that figure into grand entertaining there are live-concert rooms [see the sidebar on page 41], bowling alleys, wine cellars, nightclubs, basketball courts, rock-climbing walls, shooting ranges, and gaming arcades. The cost of just the technology for some of these entertainment spaces can run well into the six figures; factor in unique finishes, furniture, and the infrastructure required, and some homeowners are literally spending millions. But to those for whom entertaining—grandly, graciously, and lavishly—is a means of surprising and delighting their honored guests, the rewards can be positively priceless. **TME**

Steve Haas is founder and president of SH Acoustics, of Milford, Connecticut, an internationally recognized acoustic and audio consulting firm that specializes in controlling, quieting, and enhancing sound in high-end residential and institutional spaces.
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For tips on hostess gifts that go way beyond that bottle of wine, see *The Modern Estate*'s website, **themodernestate.com**; click on "This Issue," then the feature "Entertaining Grandly," and look for the material that supplements this article.

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Photographer:
Tim Lee Photography
2 Zachary Lane
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860.355.4661
www.timleephoto.com

Plum Pure Foods & Catering
(food, pp. 38, 41)
236 E. Putnam Ave.
Cos Cob, CT 06807
203.869.7586
www.plumpurefoods.com

Button
(silver vase in entrance hall, p. 38; hammered metal globes, blue votives, p. 43)
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Greenwich, CT 06830
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www.buttonhomestyle.com

S. Wyler, Inc.
(epergne with glass, silver trays, revolving tureen, plates, coffee pot, pp. 40, 41; petal bowl, p. 43)
40 West Putnam Ave.
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Design Within Reach
(Louis Ghost armchairs in crystal by Philippe Starck, pp. 40, 41)
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Westport, CT 06880/ Greenwich, CT 06830
203.227.9707/203.422.2013
www.dwr.com

McArdle's Florist & Garden Center
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203.855.1916
www.thesilktouch.com

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(antique rug in dining room, pp. 40, 41; custom carpet in living room, p. 41)
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www.vandenakkerantiques.com

Christopher Hyland, Inc.
(curtain fabric in dining room, p. 41)
D&D Building
979 Third Ave., Suite 1710
New York, NY 10022
212.688.6121
www.christopherhyland.com

Turbulence
(tortoise shell mirror in entrance hall, p. 38)
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Sentimento Antiques
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New York, NY 10021
212.750.3111
www.sentimentoantiques.com

John Boone, Inc.
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New York, NY 10021
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Chesney's Inc.
(custom fireplace in living room, p. 43)
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New York, NY 10022
646.840.0609
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Deco Deluxe
1930s French sconces in living room, p. 43)
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New York, NY 10021
212.249.5066

Scalamandré
(glass table by John Boone in living room, p. 43)
222 East 59th St.
Suites 110/210/310
New York, NY 10022
212.980.3888
www.scalamandre.com

Murano from Jean Karajian Gallery
(chandelier in living room, p. 43)
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Nancy Corzine
(couch in living room)
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