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10 Must-Have Features Pros Recommend for Entertaining at Home

See the elements pros say everyone should consider to create a lively home atmosphere for hosting family and friends



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With holiday parties on the horizon, some are thinking about how well equipped — or not — their home is for hosting guests. We asked more than 50 home design and remodeling professionals to share the design features they always recommend to homeowners looking to create a lively atmosphere for entertaining. Here are the 10 home features that came up again and again.



1. Indoor-Outdoor Connection

Hands down, the feature that pros most recommend for entertaining at home is a seamless connection between indoor and outdoor spaces. And the best way to achieve this, they say, is with walls of large retractable glass doors like those seen in this Seattle home by architect David Coleman. The opening creates a smooth transition between the kitchen and dining areas and an outdoor deck with another seating area. Another door behind the blue chairs on the right further opens the home to the outside.







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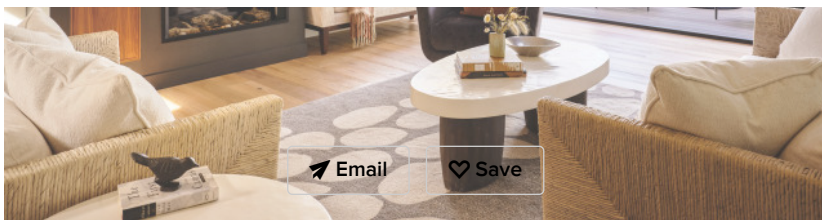


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Similarly, in this Santa Cruz, California, home by Urbana Design Studio, bifold doors fully open the living area to an expansive deck with spots for lounging and dining.

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2. Outdoor Gathering Areas

And speaking of lounging and dining, pros highly recommend outdoor gathering areas for homeowners who love to entertain. This New York pergola party pad by Eisner Design features areas for lounging, dining and cooking, all a few steps from the swimming pool.



But gathering areas don't need to be as extensive as the previous setup. Comfortable outdoor furniture like the cushioned rattan set shown on this Grand Rapids, Michigan, porch by BDR Executive Custom Homes is sure to draw guests outside and expand the festivities.

Which brings up another point: If you want guests to venture outside, pros say, invest in high-quality outdoor furniture, which people will be more inclined to use.



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3. Fire Pit or Fire Feature

And if you really want to get people outside, pros say, a fire pit or fire feature is the way to go. Great for warming guests on cold nights, providing ambiance or giving kids a way to roast marshmallows, a fire feature almost always elevates a party atmosphere.

Outside this rustic Montana home from Cooke Interiors Studio, a fire pit with surrounding Adirondack chairs creates an enticing mountainside lounge area.



This Denver outdoor seating area from Grain Construction features sleek black chairs and stools around a substantial fire table with a ledge for putting one's feet up.

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4. Home Bar

Of course, if you're keeping the party mostly indoors, a home bar is a top feature to have. Pros recommend locating a home bar away from the kitchen if possible to keep foot traffic separate from the cook.

This Grand Rapids home wet bar by Deidre Interiors features beautiful stained wood cabinetry, a dark stone countertop and backsplash, a sink, two beverage fridges and a wine fridge.



DEW Design Company

A compact dry bar like this one in Chicago by DEW Design works wonders as well. Alder cabinets and warm brown mosaic tile elevate the style. Storage, open shelves and a beverage fridge fill it with function.

The Top 10 Most Popular New Home Bars Right Now



Jarrett Design

5. Large Island With Seating

Most people tend to gravitate to the kitchen during parties — close to the food, drinks and often the host. With that in mind, pros highly recommend a large kitchen island with seating to allow people to congregate. A generous countertop will give adequate work surface that can do double duty for buffet serving. “Inevitably folks always end up in the kitchen, so designing a large counter area with seating away from the cooking is a plus,” designer Allie Mann of Case Architects & Remodelers says. “This could also be a second island space. In some instances we have designed ‘kid islands’ and ‘adult islands’ in the same space.”

This Philadelphia kitchen by Jarrett Design features a large square island with seating on two sides so guests can face each other or the host. It also helps to have a large wine fridge nearby.



Of course, if you have the space and budget, two islands with seating or an island and a peninsula, as shown in this Denver design by Caruso Kitchens, will turn the kitchen area into the life of the party. This setup will help keep people nearby while cutting down on foot traffic through the cooking area, where the host might be busy.

10 Kitchen Island Features Pros Always Recommend



6. Prep Sink on an Island End

With busy kitchens in mind, pros often recommend a secondary sink on the island to allow a guest or family member to help the host prep food. And consider placing the

sink on the outer side or end of the island. This lets guests use the sink to prep food or rinse glasses without the need to cross paths with someone using the main area of the kitchen.

“I always recommend having a prep sink in the kitchen, or two regular-size sinks,” designer Ksusha Olson of Titus Contracting says. “If one truly likes to entertain and does a lot of cooking, having two sinks in the kitchen makes food prep and cleaning so much more efficient. Not to mention being able to have multiple cooks in the kitchen at once — each with their own sink — or being able to have kids use their own sink while doing projects without impeding chefs’ spaces.”

You’ll see a prep sink strategically placed on the outside of the island in this Mercer Island, Washington, kitchen, which helps keep guests away from the main sink under the window. And that brings up another great feature to have for entertaining. This sink window from Weather Shield Windows & Doors fully expands to create a pass-through to a back deck bar area of the home.



This Portland, Maine, kitchen by Steinberg Custom Designs shows another good prep sink example. The sink is situated on the island end and outside area, giving access to family and friends without them needing to disrupt the work triangle.

Where Should You Put the Kitchen Sink?



7. Multiple Seating Areas and Furniture Pieces

Giving guests options for gathering and relaxing is important for facilitating an engaging

party atmosphere. So pros recommend creating multiple seating areas that allow for intimate conversations or larger chats, both inside and out.

Mixing seating pieces like sofas, love seats, chaise lounges, accent chairs, swivel chairs and movable footstools can make numerous arrangements possible.

“We like to provide multifunctional pieces to our clients who love to entertain,” designer Robin Violandi of Violandi + Warner Interiors says. “It might be occasional chairs or upholstered cubes that are easy to move to different rooms to provide additional seating. Multiple small side tables are great for providing a place to put a drink or a small tray for guests. All of these items are easy to move from room to room and can serve double duty.”

This Dallas living room by Delaney’s Design is a great example. It features a casual seating area near a limestone fireplace with a sofa and two armchairs. The armchairs can swivel around to face a second seating area with a sectional sofa and two movable ottomans in front of a large-screen TV.



Interior designer Uma Stewart created multiple seating areas in this New York Victorian home. The space features two sofas, side chairs, movable footstools and a low-slung leather bench that lets guests face the fireplace area or the seating area in the foreground.

Where Designers Would Spend and Save in a Living Room



8. Performance Fabrics

Party messes are inevitable when crowds of guests move through a home with drinks and food in hand. Pros recommend using indoor-outdoor rugs and furniture upholstered in performance fabrics whenever possible to help cut down on the worry.

This Houston home by Monarch & Maker features a lively living room with multiple seating options and durable fabrics. “It’s very rare that we specify upholstery on primary pieces that isn’t performance,” says Aimee Marling, a designer with the firm.

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9. Layered Lighting With Dimmers

If guests can’t see, they may struggle to carry the party on. So pros highly recommend integrating a layered lighting scheme with dimming capabilities to create the right ambiance. “Lighting plays a big part in setting the mood for entertaining,” designer Erica Peale says.

This San Francisco kitchen by In the Deets is a good example. You’ll notice recessed ceiling lights, sconces over the windows and pendants over the island.



Outside, pros recommend the same approach by layering overhead lights, uplighting, string lights and, of course, fire features. This Minneapolis outdoor area by Mom’s Design Build has it all.

Pro Tips for Lighting 10 Rooms and Outdoor Areas





10. Butler's Pantry

Lately, design pros are increasingly touting the benefits of a butler's pantry to help keep clutter out of the main kitchen. And these secondary kitchen spaces really shine during parties. A butler's pantry like this Detroit space by TK Design & Associates, with a sink, small appliances, dishwasher, work surfaces and storage, can help hide messes, assist with prep and make cleanup more efficient. "If you enjoy entertaining guests frequently, having a butler's pantry equipped with a dishwasher, a small sink and an additional refrigerator is essential," designer Megan Lin of co(X)ist Studio says.



Bonus: Party Barn

Of course, integrating the aforementioned entertaining features piecemeal into a home is just one approach. If space and budget aren't much of a concern, consider the ultimate entertaining setup: a dedicated party barn like this one in New York by Uma Stewart.

The two-story barn features a bar, TVs, shuffleboard table, dartboard, full-size golf simulator, lots of seating and other party-friendly amenities. Party on!

Your turn: What's your favorite feature for entertaining at home? Tell us in the Comments.

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