

# STYLE

THE SUNDAY TIMES

2 NOVEMBER 2025

**PLUS-ONES!**

**DRESS CODES!**

**DRUNK GUESTS!**

**DODGY DANCING!**

**HOW TO  
PARTY NOW**

**FRENCH EXITS!**

Going out?  
So over — from  
basement  
clubs to poker  
rooms, here's  
how to turn  
your home  
into a hotspot

WORDS JESSICA SALTER

# GET THE *party* STARTED

**What to do if you're** desperate to go out-out but you don't want to leave your house? Build a party pad inside your home, of course. Designers are seeing a rise in requests for niche entertaining spaces, from hidden speakeasies to nightclubs in the basement to cinema rooms and poker pits. The thing that ties them together, apart from an excess of space? It's how the design "balances sophistication with wonder," says the San Francisco-based interior designer Alexis Banks Humiston, who has worked on several luxe party pads. "You feel like the night could go anywhere — and that's when a home becomes unforgettable. You sense that something special might happen there."

## THE AT-HOME SPEAKEASY

The coolest bars in town are hidden speakeasies — and it's no different in the most exclusive homes. "Secret bars should be fun for entertaining, playful and full of luxurious details with a touch of drama," says Anthony Earle, lead concept designer at the Somerset architectural joinery and interior design studio Artichoke. For a "grand study" in Switzerland, he devised a secret bar built into the room's wood panelling, behind a double-fronted mirror. The hidden door is key to the sense of fun. The interior designer Hollie Bowden has also designed a hidden bar room, this time behind a dramatic stainless-steel door, for a home in Winchester, while Studio Vero turned a bathroom into a hidden bar behind a "secret" jib door.

But the details inside matter too, such as a dark and moody atmosphere, which the designer Emma Shone-Sanders created for a basement bar in a Parsons Green home using navy-blue textured wallcoverings from Mark Alexander. Banks Humiston went a step further for her "dramatic speakeasy" in an otherwise tranquil and light-filled home in San Francisco (left). She combined hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper, a velvet banquette and ceiling alcoves covered in copper leaf with high-tech features including a sound system built into the woodwork, hidden refrigeration and mood lighting at the flick of a custom-engraved bronze button by Lutron.

Alexis Banks Humiston designed a "decadent and bold" entertainment area with de Gournay moonlit forest wallcoverings



This picture and below Two home bars by the interior designer Bryan O'Sullivan

## IN THE CLUB

Berliners are spoilt for choice when it comes to cool clubs, but for the owners of a historic fire station in the city, the interior designer Bryan O'Sullivan turned the basement into a club inspired by the Garden of Eden, with hand-painted murals of Adam and Eve and fibreoptic lighting designed to look like stars. "This was all about creating a sense of escape — something truly otherworldly," O'Sullivan says. "You arrive through a tunnel that's completely colourless, and then suddenly you're in this riot of tropical hues — pink onyx, verdant murals, stained glass lit from behind. It's meant to be totally transportive, a space where anything can happen."

That's what two brothers — who live separately in Zurich and Cape Town — wanted from the designer Hubert Zandberg. In both their properties Zandberg installed fully integrated decks that disappear behind customised panelling when not in use, one with a baby grand piano. "They sent me a video of one of their parties where they are DJing and another guest has started accompanying them on the piano, and everyone is partying. The room enables that experience — it's just how they live."





## THE CONVERSATION PIT

Back in the Sixties, conversation pits were a feature of the best house parties — and now they're making a comeback. Beata Heuman used a Roche Bobois Mah Jong sofa to make a conversation area for a north London home, and Trilbey Gordon created a brass-panelled basement party space with a faux-fur-covered conversation pit in a west London pad (*left*).

The art of good conversation involves great listening, which forms the basis of a “listening room” that Brigitta Spinocchia Freund, the founder and creative director of Spinocchia Freund, designed for the Collector's House at Chelsea Barracks, London. The room, with its fabric-covered panelling and hand-knotted carpet to help with acoustics, is hidden behind a huge painting “so it's a surprise and delight to walk into the room”, Freund says.



From top A Seventies-style conversation pit created by Trilbey Gordon. The velvet sofa and barrel-vaulted ceiling in this London home by Erik Munro give a members' club feel

## RESTAURANT-STYLE DINING

Sure, we all now have an “outdoor kitchen” — if you mean a barbecue and a garden table — but when the well-heeled talk about alfresco dining in their outdoor kitchen it's a much bigger production. The Beckhams, for example, have a huge tented outdoor kitchen/dining room, which seats 12 — a luxury purchase from WildKitchen, the outdoor dining company founded by the film director Guy Ritchie. (Naturally he has one at his Wiltshire manor house, and has featured it in his TV series *The Gentlemen*.)

Meanwhile the tech entrepreneur Fasie Malherbe, founder and chief executive of the health and nutrition platform Feed Me Seymour, has spent £600,000 renovating the kitchen in his Richmond home (currently on sale for £9 million). For Malherbe, it was important to have eight ovens from which a team of chefs could cater for parties of up to 150 people. “It is the Rolls-Royce of kitchens,” he says of the space (*top right*), which opens up to allow the action to spill out into the garden.



From top Fasie Malherbe's kitchen features eight ovens, plus an outside pizza oven. A snooker room designed by Katharine Pooley. The brief for this home cinema was “dark and cocooning”

## THE POKER ROOM

Games nights with friends get a serious overhaul in the fanciest of party pads, such as the poker room Katharine Pooley designed for a château in Cannes. Guests have to climb through a huge bank-vault door to enter the moodily decorated room — and the fun continues: further in the bowels of the property is a full-blown bowling alley. Pooley seemingly loves a games room: at another property, in Notting Hill, she created a dedicated snooker room (*right*).



## THE MEMBERS' CLUB À LA MAISON

If a private members' club simply isn't private enough, then you might consider building your own. That's what the Canadian interior designer Erik Munro created for one couple in their central London home. “They wanted a private club feeling,” he says, so he designed a downstairs club room with an enormous velvet sofa and black barrel-vaulted ceiling (*left*).

Or what about a cinema room? Henriette von Stockhausen of VSP Interiors designed one featuring seating upholstered in the finest Italian leather. The top of the room was decorated with a custom Iksel wallpaper called Palermo Gardens (*right*). “The brief



was for a dark, cocooning atmosphere,” von Stockhausen says. “It seats up to eight, but it's most luxurious when enjoyed as a more intimate space for six.”

But perhaps the most bespoke of all is a room where you can listen to your music ... really, really loud. Emma Burns of Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler designed what she describes as a “padded cell — but a very glamorous one” for a house in Hampstead, where the owner liked to listen to very loud rock music. “We not only covered the walls in fabric but added acoustic insulation to walls, floor and ceiling.” The added benefit? “His neighbours still speak to him.” ■

Jenna Peffley, James McDonald, Zach Pontz, Kate Martin, Ollie Tomlinson, Paul Massey