

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



BY STEVE HAAS

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.

# 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

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."

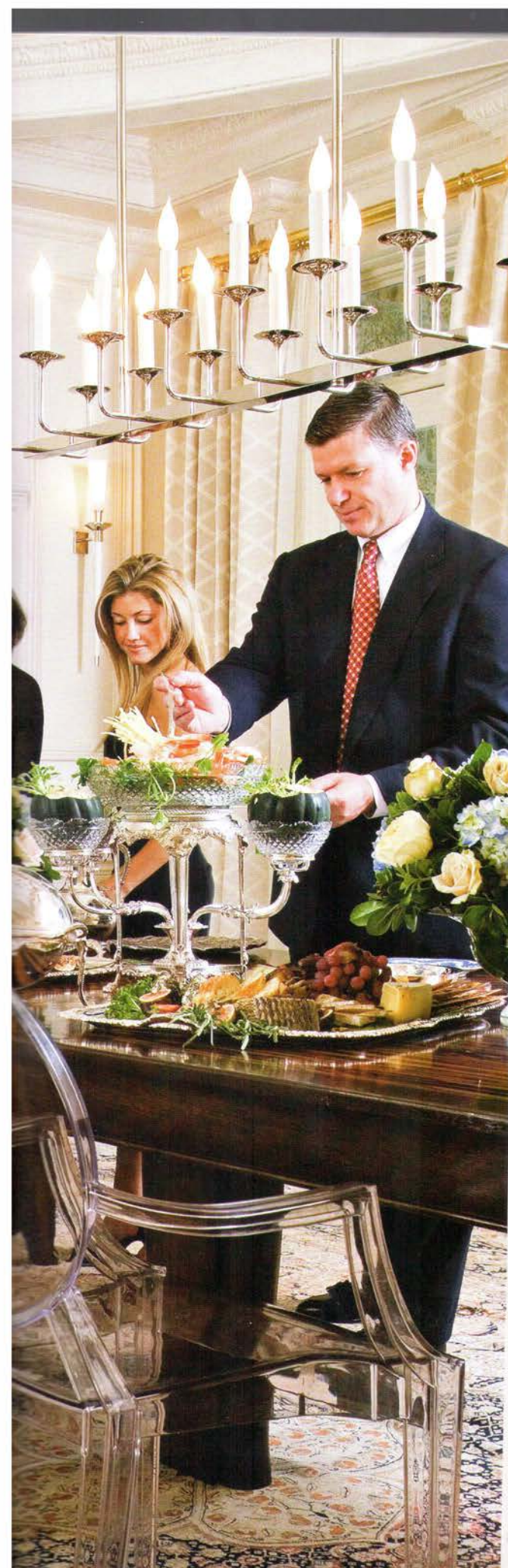
Savvy homeowners factor their entertainment style into the design, construction, or remodeling of their residence. Irene Ioffe, of R.S. Granoff Architects, notes that at least 75 percent of her firm's residential clients entertain on a regular basis. "We make it a point, at the very beginning of our 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  
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**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

