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Homeowner's UPDATE



Practice hospitality in your home

Your guests are the most important part of any dinner party, but a little extra effort to set the scene will go a long way toward creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

1. Pick a theme. Choose decorations that complement and highlight the meal you are serving. Are you cooking up an Italian-inspired menu? Pull out your cheese boards for serving appetizers and carafes full of sparkling water for the table. Are tacos on the menu? Mix and match bright, bold colors fit for a fiesta.

2. Set the table. Pull out your favorite dishes, cloth napkins and tablecloth for your guests. Add name tags for each guest and place conversation starters or trivia cards on the table, designed to help guests get to know one another better during the meal.

3. Add some flare. Use fresh flowers as a table centerpiece and add a bud vase or two in places where guests may congregate. Candlelight is an inexpensive way to add warmth as well as take your ambience to the next level. Avoid placing

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anything on the table that will be too tall for your guests to see across the table when seated.

4. Choose the soundtrack. Craft your playlist ahead of time with music that fits your theme – and include a few of your guests' favorites. They'll appreciate the thought that went into choosing the perfect soundtrack for the meal.

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The ultimate upgrades to your game day watch party

Basketball season brings lots of excitement, and these five ideas will instantly upgrade your watch party.

1. A large TV screen adds to the atmosphere and showcases the important details. Also, make sure your screen is clear of dust and fingerprints. Use a dust spray for electronics to transform your picture from dull to crystal clear in an instant.
2. Is your sound quality up to par? Investing in a new sound system, whether it's surround sound or simply adding a sound bar, upgrades your game-watching experience as well as family movie night.
3. Comfortable, roomy seating and a low table within close proximity make snacking easy.
4. Speaking of snacking, consider adding a healthy veggie tray to your classic game staples like wings and nachos.
5. Get creative with decorations that reflect your favorite teams for the ultimate super-fan viewing experience.

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Tell your story with a photo wall

If you preserve every family memory in a scrapbook or on Instagram, you may want to take those photo-worthy moments to the wall. You can create a photo wall anywhere in your home, but some of the most popular choices are stairways, great rooms and bedrooms. Focusing on a broad theme can be a fun way to display a visual narrative. Themes can span years and a variety of experiences. Choosing an adjective like "joy" or "candid" will help you decide which photos will appear on the wall.

If you seek a minimalist aesthetic, then frame your photos with large white mattes or place them on the wall with several inches between the frames.

Display your favorite vignette to zoom in and go more in-depth with a certain memory, such as a family photo shoot, adventurous antics during a summer camping trip, or an epic sports journey.

Don't be afraid to try something different! Mix and match photo sizes, frame styles, and black-and-white with color photos. Adding creative touches such as antique frames, clocks, maps, or signs give the wall splashes of color and a focal point.

Before hammering in the first nail, Crate & Barrel recommends mapping out your design with craft paper and painters tape. This is a smart way to troubleshoot your design and make sure it's exactly what you imagined.

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Open shelving maximizes space, minimizes bumped heads

You may have noticed that the latest trend on Pinterest and in home improvement stores is open shelving, or maybe you're just sick of bumping your head on an open cabinet door. Whatever your motivation might be, open shelving can give your room a facelift. And save you from bumping into that cabinet door again.

"Simplistic groupings and color choices are key so that the space looks open and airy," says Joanna Gaines of HGTV's *Fixer Upper* program.

Full open shelving

Not only does it create more visual space and interesting lines, full open shelving is also easy to clean and provides quick access to items you use on a regular basis. Here is your excuse to invest in that set of copper pots you've been eyeing.

Partial open shelving

For the less ambitious, this gives your kitchen a splash of color and personality without revealing your more practical items. Do you hesitate to put your well-loved pots and pans on display? Utilize cookbooks, succulent plants, herbs, or bowls of fruit and veggies to decorate your shelves.

Beyond the kitchen

While the kitchen might be the go-to open shelving space, your home office and dining room

are also fantastic areas to feature open shelving. Think of replacing a hutch or upgrading a bookcase with open shelves — opening up more floor space and adding a decorative touch.

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Rosemary Chicken Noodle Soup

2 Tbsp. olive oil
1 small white onion, diced
2 medium carrots, diced
2 stalks celery, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
8 cups chicken stock
3-4 stalks fresh rosemary
6 oz. wide egg noodles
2 cups shredded cooked chicken
Salt and pepper, to taste

Heat oil in a large stockpot over medium-high heat. Add onion and sauté for 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add carrots and celery, and sauté for 3-4 minutes. Add garlic, sauté for an additional 1-2 minutes. Add chicken stock, stirring until combined. Add rosemary and cook until soup simmers. Reduce heat to medium, then simmer for 5 minutes.

Remove rosemary and stir in egg noodles and chicken. Continue cooking for 8-10 minutes or until egg noodles are *al dente*. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.



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