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Party Like It's 1,999 Square Feet

Make holiday gatherings a wild success, no matter how small your space



By Amanda Erickson December 21, 2012



Geeta, Hush Supper Club's founder who goes by a single name, regularly hosts five-course dinner parties for as many as a dozen guests in her Shaw apartment.

Geeta is something of a dinner-party expert. The founder of Hush Supper Club regularly cooks up and serves five-course Indian meals (complete with drinks and storytelling) to a dozen guests — right from the comfort of her apartment in Shaw.

“My kitchen is woefully limited in terms of counter space,” says Geeta, who goes by a single name. “So I’ve spent a lot of time really looking at the geometry of my space.”

Before she begins cooking, she figures out which burners and prep spaces she’ll need and when. She stores her many spices, dried goods and serving tools on stainless steel shelves (an Ikea find) so she can find what she needs with a quick glance. “That way, I don’t forget what I have,” she says.

She decorates her dining area with engaging trinkets and treasures (many purchased off of Craigslist, including a gold-rimmed, 3-foot lamp) that get her guests asking questions. “When people say ‘I have a crappy old apartment or old space,’ that’s no excuse not to surround yourself with pretty things,” she says.

Even without a lot of space you can host boisterous holiday celebrations. The trick is cutting down on clutter and making every available

space — even spots that don't seem ready-made for eggnog and crudite — work for you.

Before your party, maximize your space. Party planner Rebecca Hoeckele, who heads up Celebration Sensations, advises moving your furniture out of the center of the room. Limit the number of chairs, she says: There should be one seat for every three guests in order to force (or at least encourage) mingling. Store table-top knickknacks in your bathtub to maximize flat spaces.

“Clutter is always going to make a space feel smaller,” Hoeckele says. “You need to make your space easy to navigate so guests can mingle and enjoy the food and drinks.”

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Hoeckele recommends putting the food and drinks on different tables so you don't have a crush of hungry party-dwellers surrounding the sips and snacks. She even recommends staggering your party start time on invitations to avoid having too many revelers in a small place at once.

Think about how you can use what's already in your home in creative ways. Hoeckele once transformed a bookcase into a bar, moving books out of the way to make room for glasses, wine and an ice bucket.

“It's all about how you can creatively use the stuff that you have,” she says. “The smaller the space, the more you need to pay attention to detail.”

There are ways to make even the tiniest of kitchens work for the ambitious chef who's promised a three-course holiday feast. First, be careful about what you bring into the kitchen. Things that take up space are bad; things that make space are good.

Leah Daniels of kitchen goods store Hill's Kitchen on Capitol Hill recommends investing in storage that can free up counter space for cooking, such as a wine-glass holder or a dish mat that folds up once you're done drying dishes. And buy appliances that have more than one function.

“Look for things that do multiple things,” she says. “That's the way to make your kitchen work for you.”

Even furniture can be transformed with a little ingenuity. “Cover your desk with a tablecloth,” she says. “All of a sudden, you have a side table.”

Christine Mitchell, 30, who likes to host “informal” brunch get-togethers, is an expert at making do in a small kitchen. This is some of what was on her last menu: Egg strata. Homemade bacon marmalade. Pumpkin crumb cake.

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Mitchell is a self-described party enthusiast. “I love to feed my friends,” she says. “Just getting people together is the goal.”

Before she moved last month, Mitchell lived in a tiny one-bedroom, where parties proved complicated.

“At first, I was very upset that I couldn’t host dinner parties the way I wanted to,” she says. But she adapted, crafting big buffet-style meals and letting friends serve themselves on pretty paper plates.

“People would sit on couches, on the balcony,” she says. “It was very organic.”

Even though Mitchell has more space in her new home in Petworth, she’s still adapting things to fit her needs. “Sitting at a table or sitting on the floor do,” she says. “As long as we laugh and enjoy the food or activity, that’s what matters.”



Amanda Erickson is deputy editor of PostEverything.

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